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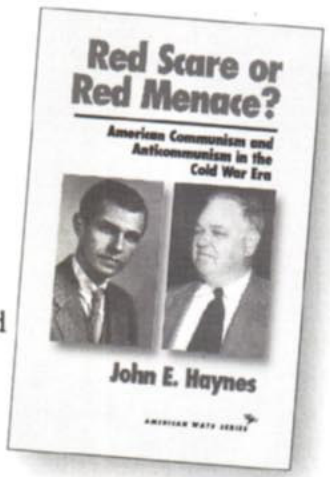

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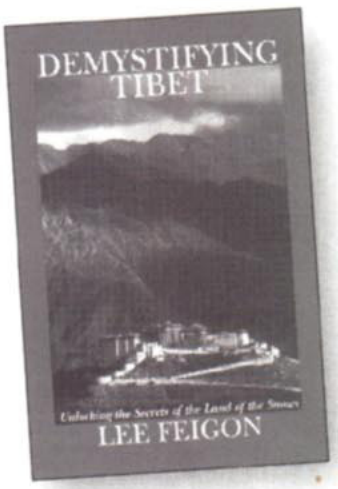

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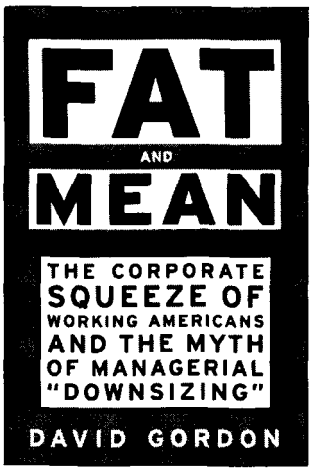

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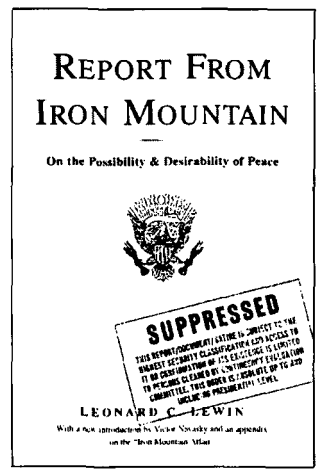

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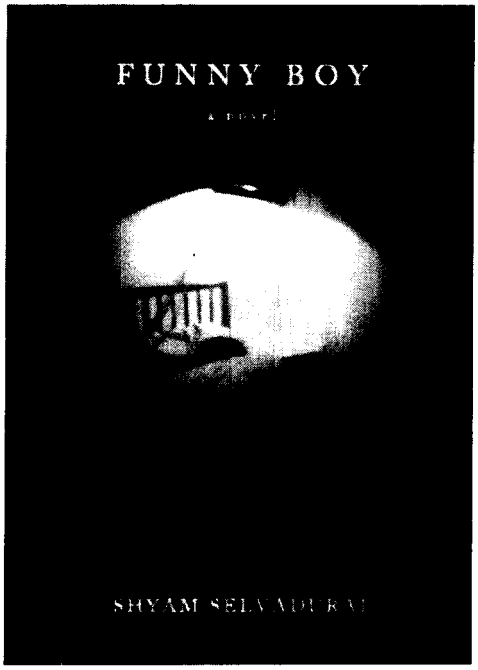
Funny Boy

A Novel

by Shyam Selvadurai



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Shyam Selvadurai was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka. He now lives in Toronto. *Funny Boy* is his first novel.

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Shyam Selvadurai will be on a reading tour in New York, Philadelphia, Washington DC, Atlanta, Chicago, San Francisco, Seattle, and Boston during April 1996.

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Editor's Page

The Arguments section has been the liveliest part of the last few *Dissents* (and judging from readers' responses, the most popular). The actual arguments have focused, several times now, on race and politics in America, and so we decided to treat that question at greater length in this issue. Martin Kilson and Phillip Richards focus, from very different angles, on the black middle class, which provided most of the participants in last October's Million Man March, and whose politics is increasingly contested by competing groups of separatists and integrationists. David Garrow writes about the inward turning in the black community, which can be, but doesn't have to be, a form of separatism. And Carol Stack reports on a new kind of community organizing in the black South.

These four articles hardly "cover" the complex connections of race and politics, but they are a beginning (and there will be another article in the Summer *Dissent*, a special issue devoted to minority rights around the world, including here at home). Racial inequality remains the single most important and most divisive problem of American society—and one with a greater potential than any other for dividing and confusing the political forces of the left. Republicans talk about race mostly in code; their message, decoded, has nothing to do with ending or reducing inequality—and it has played a central role in their campaigns in the last seven presidential elections. With affirmative action on the ballot in California, and perhaps in other states as well, 1996 will be no different. Presumably, the left's response has to include the two elements that Kilson describes in this issue: new efforts at coalition-building and new efforts at community "uplift." It is especially important to insist that the second, alone, is not enough.

The issue of race suggests emphatically that it's not *only* the economy that matters in American politics. Still, the economy does matter, in a central way, and it is ominous that the politician who has been saying this most forcefully is a Republican populist who is more than willing to speak the coded language of racism and anti-Semitism, and xenophobia generally. Patrick Buchanan argues that the troubles of American capitalism—declining wages and living standards, above all—are produced by globalization and foreign competition. There is some truth to this claim, obviously, but the argument is contrived in such a way as to deny that there is anything structurally wrong or even problematic in our domestic economy. And that claim is simply false.

David Gordon's article, the most important piece of economic analysis that we have carried in some time, is specifically a critique of *American* capitalism, and the economic reforms it calls for can be carried through without any change in the international regime: they are the legitimate and achievable goals of a domestic politics. Gordon's calmly documented but ultimately savage portrait of American companies undone by their own anti-union and anti-worker ideology should be required reading (it will soon appear as a book) for Democratic party politicians and for officials and organizers in the revived labor movement.

Labor's revival, at this moment more prospect than reality, perhaps more wish than prospect, will be the subject of a series of articles, starting in the Fall issue, put together by three of our editors, Bill Kornblum, Mark Levinson, and Jo-Ann Mort. Nothing else on the horizon would make such a difference in American politics, and so the connected efforts to increase union membership, regain the strike weapon (now virtually lost), and intervene decisively in electoral politics need to be critically and concretely assessed. This is a longstanding commitment of *Dissent*, a sign, some would say, of our nostalgia for the old left. It is in fact a sign of our longing for a new left. M.W.□

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Liberalism: Past, Present, Future

Liberalism's Crooked Circle

Letters to Adam Michnik

Ira Katznelson

This book is a profoundly moving and analytically incisive attempt to shift the terms of discussion in American politics. It speaks to the intellectual and political weaknesses within the liberal tradition that have put the United States at the mercy of libertarian, authoritarian populist, nakedly racist, and traditionalist elitist versions of the right-wing; and it seeks to identify resources that can move the left away from the stunned intellectual incoherence with which it has met the death of Bolshevism.

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau

WHY I'M FOR PROGRESSIVE TAXATION

That taxes cannot be legitimately established except by the consent of the people or its representatives, is a truth generally admitted by all philosophers and jurists of any repute on questions of public right. Contributions levied on the people are two kinds; real, levied on commodities, and personal, paid by the head. Both are called taxes or subsidies: when the people fixes the sum to be paid, it is called subsidy; but when it grants the product of an imposition, it is called a tax. We are told in *The Spirit of the Laws* that a capitulation tax is most suited to slavery, and a real tax most in accordance with liberty. This would be incontestable, if the circumstances of every person were equal; for otherwise nothing can be more disproportionate than such a tax; and it is in the observations of exact proportions that the spirit of liberty consists. But if a tax by heads were exactly proportioned to the circumstances of individuals, as what is called the capitation tax in France might be, it would be the most equitable and consequently the most proper for freemen.

These proportions appear at first very easy to note, because, being relative to each man's position in the world, their incidence is always public: but proper regard is seldom paid to all the elements that should enter into such a calculation, even apart from deception arising from avarice, fraud, and self-interest. In the first place, we have to consider the relation of quantities, according to which, *ceteris paribus*, the person who has ten times the property of another man ought to pay ten times as much to the State. Secondly, the relation of the use made, that is to say, the distinction between necessaries and superfluities. He who possesses only the common necessaries of life should pay nothing at all, while the tax on him who is in possession of superfluities may justly be extended to everything he has over and above mere necessaries. To this he will possibly object that, when his rank is taken into account, what may be superfluous to a man of inferior station is necessary for him. But this is false: for a grandee has two legs just like a cowherd, and like him again, but one belly.

A third relation, which is never taken into account, though it ought to be the chief consideration, is the advantage that every person derives from the social confederacy; for this provides a powerful protection for the immense possessions of the rich, and hardly leaves the poor man in quiet possession of the cottage he builds with his own hands. Are not all the advantages of society for the rich and powerful? Are not all lucrative posts in their hands? Are not all privileges and exemptions reserved for them alone? Is not the public authority always on their side? If a man of eminence robs his creditors, or is guilty of other knaveries, is he not always assured of impunity? Are not the assaults, acts of violence, assassination, and even murders committed by the great, matters that are hushed up in a few months, and of which nothing more is thought? But if a great man himself is robbed or insulted, the whole police force is immediately in motion, and woe even to innocent persons who chance to be suspected.

Excerpted from *The Social Contract and Discourses*, translated and with an introduction by G.D.H. Cole, 1950, pp. 320-324. Reprinted by permission of Everyman's Library, David Campbell Publishers, Ltd.

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How different is the case of the poor man! The more humanity owes him, the more society denies him. Every door is shut against him, even when he has a right to its being opened: and if ever he obtains justice, it is with much greater difficulty than others obtain favours. If the militia is to be raised or the highway to be mended, he is always given the preference; he always bears the burden which his richer neighbor has influence enough to get exempted from. On the least accident that happens to him, everybody avoids him: if his cart be overturned in the road, so far is he from receiving any assistance, that he is lucky if he does not get horse-whipped by the impudent lackeys of some young duke: in a word, all gratuitous assistance is denied to the poor when they need it, just because they cannot pay for it.

The terms of the social compact between these two estates of men may be summed up in a few words: "You have need of me, because I am rich and you are poor. We will therefore come to an agreement. I will permit you to have the honour of serving me, on condition that you bestow on me the little you have left, in return for the pains I shall take to command you."

Putting all these considerations carefully together, we shall find that, in order to levy taxes in a truly equitable and proportionate manner, the imposition ought not to be in simple ratio to the property of the contributors, but in compound ratio to the difference of their conditions and the superfluity of their possessions. □

Peter Dreier and Jeffrey Reiman

PRISONERS OF MISLEADING FACTS

A key finding in a new Department of Justice report on the nation's prison population is attracting considerable attention: nearly 7 percent of black males were in prison in 1994, compared with less than 1 percent of white males. These facts—which seem to confirm the view that a crime-prone African-American underclass is terrifying our society and overwhelming our criminal justice system—are misleading. They perpetuate racial stereotypes that don't help us address the realities of crime.

Why are black males more likely than their white counterparts to end up in prison? Is there something about African-American genes or culture that makes blacks seven times more crime prone than whites? Or can these disparities be explained better by looking at how our criminal justice system operates and at the social conditions that lead to certain kinds of criminal behavior?

Four factors explain most of the differences in white and black rates of imprisonment:

• First, although most Americans break the law every once in a while—from speeding in a car to cheating on their income taxes—our criminal justice system focuses more of its resources on some kinds of violations than on others. It concentrates on crime in the streets rather than crime in the suites. Police spend much more time looking for the perpetrators of muggings, shootings, and robberies than for white-collar criminals engaged in tax evasion, consumer product safety violations, medical malpractice, and other high crimes.

Nevertheless, white-collar crime is actually more deadly than street crime. For example, at least twice as many people die from preventable occupational diseases as from "ordinary" murders, but the corporate executives responsible for workplace deaths are almost never treated as

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criminals. And even when they are apprehended and convicted, they are more likely to be fined than imprisoned. Fewer African-Americans than whites are in a position to commit white-collar crimes.

• Second, blacks are more likely than whites to be poor and unemployed, conditions that give rise to street crime. One out of every nine white Americans lives below the poverty line compared to one out of three blacks. The unemployment rate among black Americans is typically twice that of whites. This disparity is even greater among young males, the demographic group most likely to engage in street crime. About 39 percent of black males in the crime-prone ages of sixteen to nineteen are jobless, compared with 16 percent of white males.

• Third, blacks are more likely than whites to be caught for committing the same crimes. A key factor is residential segregation. Thanks to racial discrimination by landlords and banks, poor blacks are much more likely than poor whites to live in predominantly low-income neighborhoods, where police concentrate their search for street criminals. Moreover, criminologists have consistently found that police departments arrest selectively. Police officers' perceptions and behavior are greatly influenced by the skin color, clothing, posture, and "attitude" of the people they see in their daily routine. As a result, black males are more likely to be arrested for activities that whites regularly get away with. For example, the Department of Justice's National Crime Victims Survey found that 36 percent of victims of violent attacks report that their attackers were black, but blacks made up 44 percent of those arrested for such crimes.

Or consider drug-related crimes. Criminologists regard drug arrests as largely discretionary. If you look for drug crimes, you'll find them. And the more you look, the more you find. Because almost all the looking takes place in inner-city areas, it is inevitable that blacks will be overrepresented in arrest statistics.

• Finally, blacks are more likely to be sent to prison than are whites convicted of similar crimes. For example, sentencing guidelines normally require that the perpetrator have a hundred times more cocaine in powder form than in crack form to trigger mandatory sentencing. The

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former is preferred by suburban whites, the latter by inner-city blacks. So it is no surprise that about 25 percent of all blacks in state prisons, compared with 12 percent of whites, are serving time for drug offenses.

None of this is meant to make excuses for criminals of whatever race or class. Violations of the law undermine our social and economic fabric. But we have to ask ourselves why the United States has more people in prison (and a higher rate of imprisonment) than any other democratic industrialized country. According to the Department of Justice, the number of Americans behind bars has now reached 1.1 million, a 9 percent increase over the past year and almost a 300 percent increase since 1980.

Perhaps these trends have something to do with the fact that the United States has the widest disparity of wealth and income among Western nations, declining wages, growing poverty, and persistent racial segregation. Predictably, the recent Department of Justice report on imprisonment failed to mention these facts. □

Ruth Rosen

HYPE OR HISTORY?

How Feminists Find Hope

The best antidote to feminist despair is knowledge of our own history. With each new skirmish in the gender wars, feminists fall into greater despair. We lose so often that we forget how greatly we have transformed American political culture. Feminist issues, once dismissed as "women's problems," have entered national mainstream politics where they have become a litmus test for both right and left. Our victory is that we have politicized women's experiences and forced the nation to debate them.

Media hype, however, only confirms our worst fears that an anti-feminist backlash is ubiquitous. I still remember the despair I felt after the Senate voted to confirm Clarence Thomas for a seat on the Supreme Court. For hours I couldn't shake my sense of disbelief. Then I did what I always do when the present becomes too excruciating. I imagined how I would interpret these events if I were a historian looking back from the vantage point of 2075. It is an experiment that pulls me out of despair, recharges my intellect, and allows me to analyze contemporary events in historical perspective.

From the vantage of 2075, this is how it might look. For more than two decades, the gender wars have simmered, occasionally erupting into public life. Before the contemporary women's movement ignited these battles, men were protected by women's shame. But then, feminists began naming the hidden injuries of sex. What our mothers once called, with a resigned shrug of the shoulders, "the facts of life," became newly labeled as gender crimes. Laws changed, although public consciousness lagged far behind.

During the late 1960s and 1970s, second-wave feminists boldly drew attention to experiences that had once been considered private matters. As a critical mass of women entered the labor force, feminists coined the term sexual harassment to describe unwanted sexual attention in the workplace. In the wake of the sexual revolution, they named coercive sex between acquaintances date rape. Violence at home and in the street began to be exposed and reviled. Meanwhile, gay men and lesbians struggled to

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persuade society that their sexual orientation was an individual right, not a cause for discrimination.

The "good old days" when men could abuse or harass women with impunity were fast disappearing. But a new national consensus had not yet been reached. When does sexual interest cross the line and turn into harassment? When does "no" really mean "no"? Men were baffled; they no longer knew how to behave with women. Women were confused as well. Even feminists sharply debated whether new policies should protect women or safeguard their newfound sexual freedoms.

Many of the most hyped trials and hearings of the late twentieth century should be viewed as battles that pushed feminist issues into the national consciousness. Consider, for example, the flurry of sex scandals and controversies that titillated a public puzzled by changing ideas about "appropriate" sexual behavior. The Clarence Thomas hearings, the William Kennedy Smith and Mike Tyson date rape trials, the Navy's Tailhook sex scandal, the Spur Posse sexual assaults in Lakewood, California, the gang rape of a retarded girl in New Jersey, the furious debate over homosexuals in the military, and yes, even the O.J. Simpson trial, publicized feminist issues and encouraged the American public to take sides in the gender wars.

All of this focused public attention on the injustices women once suffered in silence. In many cases, the men in these trials or hearings were believed, acquitted, or exonerated. But the issues persisted.

Consider the outcome of the Thomas hearings. In the fall of 1991, when the Senate confirmed Thomas, most Americans disbelieved Anita Hill's accusations. Yet just one year later, a majority had changed their minds and believed that Hill had told the truth. Why? What had happened? The hearing ignited a national consciousness-raising session. Afterward, many women, both black and white, publicly recounted their own experiences of being sexually harassed. As a result, more Americans began to understand why a hostile work environment violated the rights of working women.

Men were affected as well. Soon after the Thomas confirmation, thousands of American men reportedly worried about how to treat their female co-workers without being accused of sexual harassment. They complained about their new self-consciousness and their growing self-doubt. But their discomfort, though regrettable, was minor compared to the shame and harassment that women workers had experienced for centuries.

Who can deny that the legacy of those hearings was momentous? In the gloomy days following Hill's ritual humiliation, few feminists imaged that just four years later, Bob Packwood would prove such an embarrassment that his colleagues would force him to leave the Senate. Some Senators even seemed downright eager, even desperate, to prove that yes, they had finally "gotten it."

When the O.J. Simpson trial ended, many feminists were despondent and angry that the jurors—as well as many Americans—had not grasped the connection between repeated domestic violence and murder. But, like the Thomas/

In Memoriam

The editors of *Dissent* mourn the recent deaths of two long-time editors. We will print fuller tributes in future issues.

BERNARD ROSENBERG joined our editorial board in 1955, a year after the founding of the magazine. During his career he was the author of many books and articles on politics and culture. He taught at Brandeis, City College, and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. His wit and learning enlivened our pages.

MEYER SCHAPIRO, a world-renowned art historian, was one of our founding editors, and for more than forty years he remained one of our guiding lights.

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Hill hearings, the Simpson trial will ripple through the culture, creating unexpected repercussions.

During the trial, the defense tried to characterize the prosecution's case as a racial attack. It wasn't, but African-Americans have plenty of good reasons—besides Mark Furhman—to distrust white authority, particularly local police. In the wake of the Republican assault against welfare, health care, public education, and affirmative action, black Americans justifiably feel besieged.

But the trial was not only about race and class. It was about a gender crime, that of male violence against women. This, I believe, will be the legacy of this historic trial, one of the momentous battles in the gender wars. Long after the media have shifted our attention to another trial, Americans will have learned that battering is a crime that often results in murder and that domestic violence cuts across all races and classes.

For far too long, Americans have regarded violence against women as a fact of life, rather than as a crime that is wholly incompatible with a democratic society. As prosecuting attorney Marcia Clark ended her summation, she wanted jury members to hear the voice of Nicole Brown Simpson crying out for the right to live. Don't be surprised if it is this voice that lives on to haunt us all.

When I engage in my thought experiment, I become guardedly optimist. We need to remind ourselves that slavery was once socially acceptable. Just months ago the women of the world at the Fourth UN Women's Conference unanimously agreed that violence against women constitutes a violation of their human rights. One day it may be as unthinkable for a man to beat a woman as it is for anyone to own another person.

The battles of the gender wars leave terrible scars, but they have redrawn the national and international political agendas. That doesn't guarantee any successful battles. Rather, we should brace ourselves for waves of backlash.

Our great victory is that we have changed the terms of debate. In the darkness of our despair, let us remember that the gender wars have just begun. □

Peter Laarman

GATTCHA!

In contrast with the headlines generated by the original GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) controversy of two years ago, the news from Geneva on January 17 made barely a ripple; small items in the business pages reporting that a three-judge panel of the World Trade Organization (WTO) had ruled in favor of Venezuela and against the United States in a dispute involving Venezuelan gasoline. For three years, the U.S. government had barred Venezuela's state refiner from shipping a product high in smog-producing "aromatic" chemicals to East Coast service stations. The WTO's judges ruled that this country acted unfairly in demanding that Venezuelan gasoline meet the same average purity standard as gasoline refined domestically. Although the arguments were technical, the upshot is that the United States can ignore the ruling, appeal it, or allow the Venezuelan gasoline to be sold.

"Aromatic" is actually a good word for the predicament pro-GATT forces now find themselves in. It's little wonder that the main U.S. proponents of the GATT's new dispute-resolu-

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tion mechanism—Trade Representative Mickey Kantor and Treasury officials Robert Rubin and Lawrence Summers—had almost nothing to say about the gasoline ruling. It must be rather embarrassing to them and to the White House that the very first WTO case would challenge administration enforcement of the Clean Air Act. The *New York Times*, which also plumped relentlessly for the streamlined trade accord, reassured its readers that the WTO decision "does not force the U.S. to change its law." But the *Times* editorialist (Peter Passell) surely knows that the United States can ill afford to stiff the very GATT procedures it earlier insisted were essential to rapid trade expansion.

Without question, Pat Buchanan (and possibly Bob Dole) will take the WTO decision as another assault on American sovereignty. Buchanan has played the sovereignty card effectively on the campaign trail, mainly to manipulate nativist sentiment but also to expose the role of transnational capital in undermining U.S. living standards.

It would be unfortunate for the left to abandon the sovereignty argument to Buchanan and his epigones, because there is an important progressive spin to be put on the WTO case. For leftists, the real danger is not (or not only) that "foreign judges" can challenge U.S. environmental and consumer safeguards when these appear to discriminate against imports. One can think of situations in which an international trade tribunal might rule against U.S. law or U.S. practice for what we would consider to be *good* reasons: say, because U.S. workers were forced to work in conditions that fell below those of an acceptable world standard. But such scenarios are not likely now, for the simple reason that the WTO we have was created as part of the larger push toward lowest-common-denominator standards where workers, consumers, and the environment are concerned. The agency is charged with knocking down all barriers that stand in the way of expanded trade, and never mind if some of those "barriers" include health and safety standards that progressives in many countries struggled hard to win.

Pace Buchanan, the enemy is not globalism as such; it *is* the money managers' version of a globalism in which the interests of workers and consumers are subordinated to investor returns. We have yet to imagine what a people's globalism would look like. This might be a good time to start. □

To Our Contributors

A few suggestions:

(1) Be sure to keep a copy of your manuscript. And please remember that we can't return articles unless they're accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

(2) Please don't write to ask whether we're interested in such and such an article—it makes for useless correspondence. Look at our last few issues to see if your idea fits in. Or take a chance and send us your article. We will not consider manuscripts submitted simultaneously to several publications.

(3) Type your ms *double-spaced*, with *wide* margins. Check all your figures, dates, names, etc.—they're the author's responsibility. No dot matrix submissions, *please*. Use WordPerfect 5.1 or standard text ASCII format, and send us the disk. Please use inclusive language so that we don't have to make adjustments during editing. If you are submitting to *Dissent* electronically, our e-mail address is dissent@igc.apc.org.

(4) Notes and footnotes should also be typed double-spaced, on a *separate* sheet. As we're not an academic journal, we prefer that they, wherever possible, be dropped altogether or worked into the text.

(5) We're usually quick in giving editorial decisions. If there's a delay, it's because a few editors are reading your article.

(6) Please bear with us—we have accumulated quite a backlog of material, and you may have to wait for a few issues before you see your article in print.

THE EDITORS □

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Erazim Kohák

THE SEARCH FOR EUROPE

Czechs Drawn to Two Traditions

There is no more Czechoslovakia, nor is there likely to be one in the foreseeable future. The governments of the two rump states, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, do not like to be reminded that there ever was a Czechoslovakia. We're on our way to Europe, so why revive old memories?

Indirectly, the guru of the Paris National Institute for Demographic Research, Emmanuel Todd, has offered an answer. Ten years ago, he made his reputation by predicting with clinical precision that the Soviet Union would soon disintegrate. Recently, in an interview with *Newsweek* (January 29, 1996), he spoke of the Europe that the Czech government is so eager to join. His reflections on France were telling:

> There are two main currents in French society. One is the well-known one, advertised around the world: the republican obsession with equality. But there is another France that makes its appearance during some of the uglier moments of French history. It's not anchored in traditions of egalitarianism, but in those classes and regions that are much more authoritarian, areas where the Catholic Church remained very strong, and which stood against the France that was secular, republican, atheist . . . in this century, the France that came to power at the moment of the Vichy regime was this Catholic, authoritarian France.

It was a strange France. It was not yet under German military rule: though France was defeated in 1940, the *Wehrmacht* occupied only its Atlantic coast, much as at first it occupied only the fortified border regions of Czechoslovakia. Until 1944, unoccupied France continued to be ruled from Vichy by the rightist regime of Marshal Pétain, under German patronage but also with the support of a significant number of the French. The words that embodied my boyhood ideal of France, *Liberté, egalité, fraternité!*, disappeared from French coins, replaced by the slogan of the other France: *Travail, famille, patrie.* Liberty was displaced by civic virtues—by diligence and piety, family values, ethnicity, and respect for one's betters, much as in more recent rightist rhetoric.

A similar double current flows through Czech society. There is one tradition that I have always accepted as the core of my national identity. It is a tradition of democratic idealism, of freedom and openness, with a strong sense of justice and social responsibility, represented most clearly by Czechoslovakia's first president, the philosopher T.G. Masaryk.

This tradition can claim roots in a revolution, the fifteenth-century Hussite revolt of common people against the rule of the lords and the church. It may not be strictly accurate historically, but our symbolism does run parallel to that of the French.

Modern Czech identity grew out of that tradition. The driving force of the national revival was a quest for an ethnic cultural rebirth. The nation was mostly Catholic, but the Catholic church in Austro-Hungary was the ideological arm of the monarchy and therefore unavailable for cultural appropriation. The aristocracy was largely German, threatened by Czech aspirations. The men and women of the revival naturally turned to French models and based their program on democracy, with a strong populist strain.

A historian could speak of two nations. One was liberal, open, democratic. The other was conservative, aristocratic, authoritarian. Masaryk

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stood clearly for the first; the more conservative strata sympathized with the second. Austrian rule obscured the difference. To Czech activists it seemed that the supporters of the second nation were really not Czech at all, and that all true Czechs were devoted to *liberté, egalité, fraternité* in native dress, as freedom, democracy, and social conscience.

With the rise of Czechoslovakia on the ruins of the Hapsburg monarchy in 1918, the contradictions stood out sharply. Masaryk and his allies identified Czechoslovakia wholly with the ideals of the national revival. Those who did not subscribe to those ideals were quickly marginalized. They came into their own only after Munich. For eight months their rule reflected that attitude of the other Czech (and Slovak) nation. It was not a German military regime. It was Czech, through representing those dark aspects of the Czech psyche that Masaryk's democrats had never confronted. It evoked the traditions of diligence and piety, family values, respect for privilege and authority. Newt Gingrich would have loved it.

Is that, though, a Czech and French peculiarity? A great many Czechs, like a great many French, would like to attribute to their nation nothing but a pure love for freedom, democracy, and social responsibility, writing off the other tradition as a German trait. Yet that won't do. Certainly, most of the German-speaking lands did not undergo either forcible transformation, like the Czechs after the Hapsburg conquest in 1620, or a radical revolution like the French in 1789. They did not experience a far-reaching collapse of traditional social structures or the atomization of society. Yet Germany, too, passed through a Reformation and an Enlightenment. German nationalism also grew out of liberal roots and not only had its version of *travail, famille, patrie* but also its clear echo of *liberté, egalité, fraternité*. It was German social democracy that gave European democracy its modern form. It is a crucially important question—not only for the French and for the Czech, but also for German democracy—on which foundation it will build. As Germany goes, so will Europe—and if Germany chooses the more conservative way, most smaller countries are likely to conclude that the Norwegians were right and opt out.

The question really is a European one. Europe as a cultural unity was born of the decision for a life of freedom and responsibility. It refused to base its identity on a "natural" or a traditional, time-honored order, as other societies the world over had done. This audacious choice understandably provoked a sense of vertigo and with it the temptation to return to tradition and authority. Let the prince rule ever so badly, as long as he rules firmly! The dialectic of the longing for freedom and the fear of freedom embodied by the two mottos on French coins is universally European. Most thoughtful observers on Europe's fringes cannot avoid the question: which Europe are we joining?

The answer is both, though not equally. The powerful and the privileged are joining one Europe, and the opinion makers among them are unambiguous in their support. If Václav Havel, the lone survivor of the glory days of the Velvet Revolution, has any misgivings, he is keeping them to himself. Václav Klaus, the prime minister, voices his misgivings, but only because he considers even a Vichy Europe too leftist. Let me quote Emmanuel Todd once more:

> The people think they are still living in the France of 1789—*liberté, egalité, fraternité*—and the elite thinks it's entering a new world where power comes from on high, and the infallibility of the central banks has replaced the infallibility of the Pope.

In the ex-communist lands, we would be likely to say, it replaces the infallibility of the Communist party. We have just emerged from a period when our rulers insisted on authoritarian values while masking them with revolutionary slogans. Our symbols are all out of joint. At the time of the Velvet Revolution, we dared reach for a life in freedom. Six years later, the largest bloc of voters clearly longs for the reassurance of a strong hand, be it that of the Thatcherite Klaus in the Czech Republic, the populist Meciar in Slovakia, or ex-Communist politicians elsewhere. The German version may be the security of the strong deutsche mark and the infallibility of the Bundesbank. For Europe has both the glow of freedom and the vertigo to which it gives rise. It was, after all, Adolf Hitler who claimed, "Germany fights for Europe." Europe? Which Europe?

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Then why hark back to Masaryk and to Czechoslovakia? Simply because the "Masaryk Republic" is for Central Europe what the Great Revolution is for France or 1848 for Germany, an embodiment of our hopes for freedom, democracy, social responsibility. Perhaps that is why our current politicians never mention it. Yet we would find it hard to live in a Czech Republic that builds on the tradition of *travail, famille, patrie* and the period after Munich. The French would find it hard to live in a France that invoked the tradition of Vichy, Germans in the Germany of Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm—or the easy-going modern Austrians in the Hapsburg monarchy.

It is hard to avoid the unhappy impression that the Maastricht Europe is a Europe of *travail, famille, patrie*. Each new military adventure and social upheaval in the former Soviet Union brings home the desperate urgency of building a unified Europe, capable of defending itself—and the urgent need this time to be on the Western side of the great divide. Yet a Europe of the privileged elites is simply not viable in the long run—and each new move in Brussels reinforces the impression that a united Europe would be just that. Europe's heart, though, is *Liberté, egalité, fraternité!* "If it is true," to quote Todd once more, "that you cannot govern against the will of the people, it's also true you can't govern against the elites." The result is gridlock.

Franklin Roosevelt managed to govern with the will of both. Unfortunately, even America seems rather short of FDRs these days, and Europe has never abounded in them. Its future may well depend on whether it can find one now. □

Stephen Bornstein and Pierre-Eric Tixier

OF MOUNTAINS AND MICE: THE FRENCH STRIKES OF 1995

From late November 1995 until a few days before Christmas, the workers of France's public sector occupied center stage. They brought buses and subways in French cities to a halt, cut rail traffic to a trickle, slowed the flow of cars, of the mails and of electricity, organized monster demonstrations twice or more every week, and finally forced Prime Minister Alain Juppé to call a "Social Summit" to deal with their grievances. For many observers, both in France and abroad, this was May '68 all over again.

Such nostalgic exaggerations should be avoided. The 1995 strikes affected much less French economic activity than did the great 1968 "events." The private sector remained entirely untouched. Even within the public sector, the strikes remained largely confined to a few branches with very little impact on other key areas that had played such a central role in 1968—nationalized industries, the airlines and airports, the civil service, the health system, the social services network, and the like. In addition, the students and teachers, whose role had been so pivotal in 1968, played a much more limited, secondary and narrowly focused role this time. Finally, the strikes of 1995 featured a very narrow set of issues—pensions, health care, job security—when compared to the broad-gauged attacks on the foundations of capitalist society that emerged in 1968.

Not another May, then. But impressive, nonetheless: millions of workers on strike for almost

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a month; municipal buses and subways, commuter trains, and the country's fabled TGV rail system shut down; the thruways and roads in the country's main cities throttled by unprecedented gridlock; huge demonstrations of strikers, students and their supporters week after week, not just in Paris but all across the country.

And yet, the ultimate results of the strikes were surprisingly meager. When compared not only to the lengthy list of concessions, commitments, and promises that union leaders brought out of the "Grenelle Summit" in 1968, but even to the limited demands of the 1995 strikers, the results of the December 21 Matignon meeting were not impressive—a delay in the implementation of the plan for restructuring the railways, a promise not to go ahead with plans to raise the retirement age in parts of the public sector that had special arrangements, a pledge that the government would implement expansionary macroeconomic measures, and a vague promise of discussions on job-sharing and work-week reduction in order to create employment. Nonetheless, the end of the summit brought the end of the strikes. Within a day or two, France had pretty much returned to normal. As various pundits put it, "The mountain had labored and brought forth a mouse."

Or is there more here than meets the eye? We think there may prove to be. For starters, there already are signs that the sudden folding of the strikes does not necessarily mark the end of the story. With unemployment figures on the rise, real incomes flat, and economic insecurity deepening, it appears likely that industrial and social unrest will persist, although new protests might not be on the same scale or of the same intensity as those of last winter. Observers of French industrial relations agree that the grievances that provoked the 1995 strikes have not been eliminated and that French workplaces, in both public and private sectors, remain ripe for further outbreaks of protest and disruption. And union leaders have made clear their determination to continue their aggressive approach toward the government and its retrenchment plans. The Chirac-Juppé team that looked so solidly installed at the dual helms of the French ship of state may be in for more rough seas ahead.

Even if there is no substantial resumption of unrest this spring, however, the strikes have already revealed something very instructive about contemporary France. Despite fourteen years of non-socialist Socialist rule under the late François Mitterrand, France has not become a normalized, pacified, stabilized clone of Helmut Kohl's Modell Deutschland. France seems today just as prone to crisis, as vulnerable to instability, and, possibly, as open to fundamental transformation as it was shown to be by the "events" of May-June 1968. Many of the features that contributed to the eruption of the 1968 crisis—highly centralized patterns of authority in political, economic, and social institutions; a hypertrophied and paternalistic state; the smallest, weakest, most fragmented, and most politicized trade unions in the developed world; an underdeveloped system of collective bargaining and social conflict regulation—all still pertain today, and they go a long way toward explaining how the 1995 strikes emerged, expanded, and persisted. The recent strikes thus reveal that French "exceptionalism" has persisted. France is still an imperfectly developed and imperfectly integrated capitalist society at the heart of late capitalist Europe. This is a lesson that both the conservative forces currently in control of the French state and their socialist opponents would do well to take to heart.

A final message can be read from the demands on which the strikers focused and from the surprising support that their movement elicited from the French public. It is a lesson that may prove relevant well beyond the boundaries of France. The strikes emerged from the efforts of railway workers and other public servants to defend their jobs, their career expectations, their health care, and their retirement plans from rationalization and privatization schemes developed as part of the response of French policy makers to the twin challenges of globalization and European unification. As the French state has contracted, first under Mitterrand and now under Chirac; as public services are curtailed or privatized; as France—like other European societies—becomes leaner and meaner, large numbers of public employees and their families have begun to lose a grip on many of the certainties

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around which their lives used to pivot.

What is noteworthy is the way their fears and their disorientation resonated not only in the media but among the broad French public that, day after grueling day for almost a month, put up with the dislocations produced by the transport strikes and continued to tell pollsters that they sympathized with the strikers and their demands. That such massive, lengthy, and popular strikes could have developed around these sorts of job-security, public-service, and welfare-state issues suggests that some of the central structures of the European mixed economy may well prove more resistant than previously expected to the winds of neoliberalism blowing from Bonn, Washington, and London. Elites in France, and elsewhere in Europe, may have been ignoring, at their own peril, the advice of Jacques Delors, who, during his final term as president of the European Commission repeatedly warned that, for the forces of market integration and rationalization to work effectively, their impact has to be tempered by a "social dimension" that takes human consequences into consideration. □

Román de la Campa

CUBA: IDEOLOGY MEETS GLOBALIZATION

In the last year the American focus on Cuba has shifted from emigration to trade. The threat of unwanted landings of hundreds of thousands of boat people has abated. Nearly all the Guantánamo refugees have been transferred to Florida without incident. In an apparent quid pro quo with Washington—much deplored in Miami—Castro and the United States made it illegal for Cubans to take to the seas toward American shores.

But agreements or any sign of stability between Cuba and the United States are always subject to the needs and concerns of the Cuban exile community, whose political influence in South Florida has grown considerably. Cuba recently shot down two Miami-based Cessna planes, resulting in the death of four Cuban exiles. The planes were operated by Brothers to the Rescue, an exile organization whose primary purpose has been to spot Cuban rafters in the Florida Straits and inform the U.S. Coast Guard, which then provided immediate rescue.

After the agreement between the United States and Cuba declaring rafters illegal, Brothers to the Rescue began to undertake riskier missions, including flights directly over Havana to drop anti-Castro leaflets. After various attempts to warn the pilots over the past few months, Castro took the most violent and dramatic course of action against them: he ordered MIG fighters to blow the exile planes out of the skies. With the exception of China, the world community found such action wholly incommensurate with the threat posed by the planes.

Unlike previous provocations and violent episodes involving Miami, Havana, and the United States, this one will only briefly follow the historical pattern set during the cold war. Miami will once again rally in asking for a U.S. invasion of Cuba, Castro will call for unity against the colossus to the north, and Clinton will support a tightening of the embargo, at least until the fall elections. In time, however, globalization will reassume its commanding position in the current geopolitical spectrum and the politics of Cuba will return to trade.

Many believe that the outstanding issues between the two countries are now overwhelmingly economic. It is clear that the thirty-year-old embargo of the Cuban economy is a relic of the cold

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war—and an obstacle to the triumphant march of global capitalism. The only problem is that neither side of the conflict can unambivalently shed its long-standing ideological objections to such a conclusion.

William Safire and A.M Rosenthal, for example, have inveighed against lifting the embargo. At the root of their objections, it would appear, is an uneasiness with the political culture of globalization—an uncertain longing, perhaps, for a more principled world order where foreign policy could still speak (or at least pretend to speak) for American democratic values. Not all Americans have reconciled themselves to neoliberal capitalism as a new form of global manifest destiny.

In contrast to such yearnings for an Evil Empire to deplore, consider a striking event of last autumn—the love feast between an aging but born-again-neoliberal Fidel Castro and corporate America at the UN anniversary celebration in New York. Did that festive gathering constitute the dawn of a New World Order, where former guerrillas and investors can finally come together?

In one respect, Castro's continued presence on the international scene ought to gratify the American right. He ought to constitute a living reminder of all that the Forces of Righteousness vanquished during the cold war. But such self-celebration loses its savor when Castro is found happily toasting an increasingly transnational moneyed class, while continuing to impose himself on the Cuban people.

In an hour-long CNN interview with Bernard Shaw, the Cuban leader broke new ideological ground as he spoke of the "morality" of capitalist investors—waxing philosophic about how impressed he was with their culture of competition and their lack of political prejudice in their choice of investment opportunities. When asked about Colin Powell's book *My American Journey,* Castro revealed that a team of forty translators had rendered the work into Spanish in four days. Neither the English nor the Spanish version was for sale to ordinary Cubans; the translation was done solely for use at the highest levels of government. At one point, Castro seemed to suggest that Cuba was willing to market the

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book in Spanish in a joint venture with Powell for sales strictly outside Cuba. For those who cling to Castro and Cuba as symbols of revolutionary defiance, such moments will require ever greater acts of faith and perhaps even nostalgia.

And what of the situation within Cuba? Is Castro ready and willing to move toward economic change or is he just pretending? While courting international investment, the regime remains determined in its efforts at internal control. Foreign ownership of business is now allowed in Cuba, though the labor force must be contracted solely through the state; wages are charged in hard currency to employers and paid out in pesos. Disparities between those with access to dollars and those without it has reached intolerable proportions. For the first time since the revolution, taxes have been introduced to redistribute wealth from those who have access to dollars to their less fortunate fellow citizens.

On the political front, a new organization, the Cuban Council, has come to life. It serves as an umbrella or network for more than ninety nongovernmental organizations. This, in itself, is indicative of a much greater level of pluralistic engagement by the Cuban people than most American commentators could have imagined even a year ago. In one of its first official communiqués, released in December 1995, the council called for a peaceful transition to a more democratic state of law, amnesty for political prisoners, universally recognized human rights, and economic liberalization for all Cubans. The Cuban Council is outlawed in Cuba. It is a significant internal threat to Castro's rule. The February attack on exile planes was likely intended to divert attention from this opposition force. It is important to note, however, that the Cuban Council remains unsupported or under suspicion by the most powerful exile organization in the United States, the Cuban National Foundation, headed by Jorge Más Canosa.

Ideological ambivalence in Cuba is also evident in the cultural sphere. Perhaps the clearest glimpse comes from recent films such as *Strawberry and Chocolate*, directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabio. *Strawberry and Chocolate* received an Oscar nomination for the best foreign film of 1995. One couldn't find a more biting and yet refreshing critique of the revolution as an ongoing cultural project. The film is a far cry from Socialist Realism. David—a young, male, mildly homophobic, militant but still impressionable student—turns to a marginalized gay tutor and a prostitute for lessons on great Cuban literature, true comradeship, and lasting love.

But it should be noted that *Strawberry and Chocolate* ultimately calls for cultural conservatism as a barrier against national disintegration. David's new tutors emphasize better diction, proper grammar, canonical Cuban literature, the music of the fifties, religious observance, and the hidden beauty of old Havana.

Alea and Tabio's film presents a nationalism capable of bridging the gap between Cuba and its exile community. It is not clear, however, how such cultural conservatism will fare in the face of the material advantages that the exiles command. Once the wealth of the exiles is felt in Cuba and the regime's control of the written word wanes, will anyone still care about the cultural program sketched in *Strawberry and Chocolate*? Indeed, the film's richest irony may well be that such an emphasis on literary values is most feasible in a socialist society that lacks creature comforts, idolizes books, reveres high culture, and covets censored works. □

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David M. Gordon

UNDERPAID WORKERS, BLOATED CORPORATIONS

Two Pieces in the Puzzle of U.S. Economic Decline

There are two tendencies in the American economy that many have noticed as isolated phenomena but that few connect with each other. The first is the enduring decline of most U.S. workers' real wages. The second is the top-heavy, bloated scale of U.S. corporate bureaucracies. These two tendencies are neither accidental nor coincidental but structurally linked and mutually interdependent. They go together like horse and carriage; in the U.S. context, it appears that you can't have one without the other.

What is the nature of this connection? Wages have been declining alongside enduring top-heavy corporate bureaucracies in the United States to a considerable degree because our production, labor, and managerial relations continue to rely on the stick rather than the carrot. Both the vast majority of U.S. workers and the aggregate economy itself pay a very heavy price as a result.

The Wage Squeeze

Since the mid-1970s, more and more U.S. workers have been enduring steady downward pressure on their hourly take-home pay. The wage squeeze has afflicted not merely the poor and the disadvantaged but the vast majority of U.S. households.

It's not as easy as one might suppose to trace this tendency. Since the Great Depression and the spread of the union movement, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics had kept track of the living standards of the average American worker with published data on *spendable earnings*. But in 1981 the Reagan administration discontinued the index, citing conceptual and measurement problems.

So more than a decade ago, my collaborators Sam Bowles, Tom Weisskopf, and I proposed an alternative version of the spendable earnings index, with modifications designed to address each of the specific problems raised about the traditional indicator. Because for some unaccountable reason the Reagan administration ignored our advice and persisted in providing no official record of trends in workers' take-home pay, we have ourselves continued to maintain and update what we consider to be the most telling available indicator of workers' earnings.

Our index of *real spendable hourly earnings* provides a straightforward measure of the average production or nonsupervisory worker's *real take-home pay*—a measure of hourly earnings controlling for both inflation and taxes. Production and nonsupervisory workers made up 82 percent of total employment in 1994 and represent that group in the labor force that is most clearly dependent on wage and salary income.

Figure 1 charts the level of average real spendable earnings for production and nonsupervisory employees in the United States from 1948 to 1994.

The data show a clear pattern. The average

As we went to press, we learned of the death of David Gordon during heart surgery. His death is a great loss not only to his family, friends, and colleagues at the New School, but to the larger community of the left.

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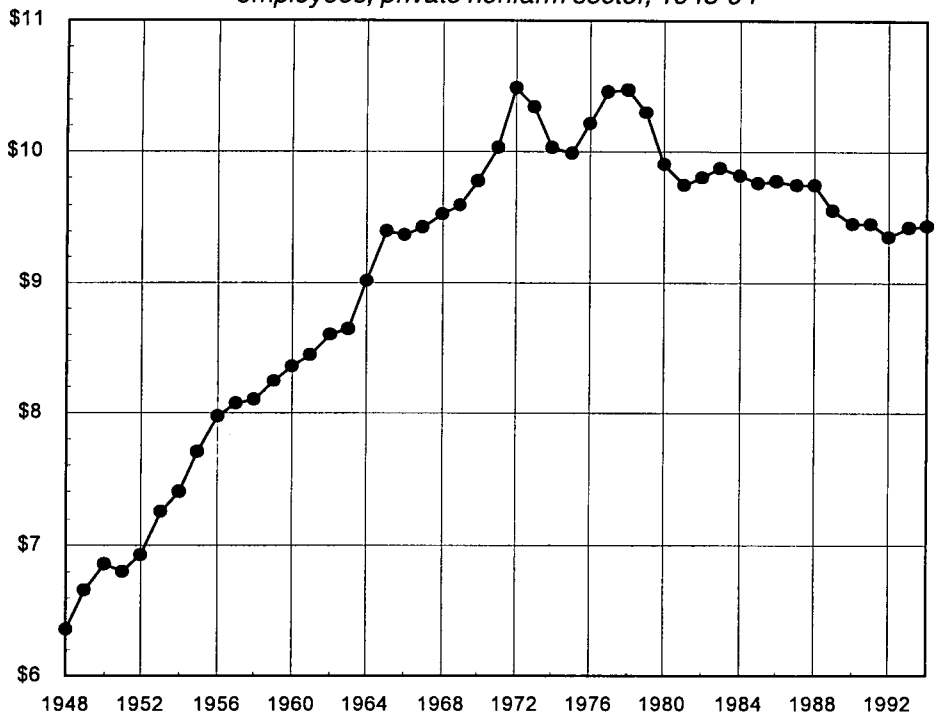
Fig. 1. The Wage Squeeze

Real spendable hourly earnings ($1994), production/nonsupervisory employees, private nonfarm sector, 1948-94



worker's real after-tax pay grew rapidly through the mid-1960s. Its growth then slowed, with some fluctuation, until the early 1970s. After a postwar peak in 1972, our measure of earnings declined fairly steadily, through the rest of the 1970s and 1980s. Despite the recovery from the recession of 1990-1991, real spendable hourly earnings were lower in 1994 than they had been in the business-cycle trough of 1990.

Most dramatically, *real spendable hourly earnings had fallen back to below the level they had last reached in 1967.* It's not just that the pace of real wage growth for the vast majority of workers has slowed. Real hourly take-home pay has been declining for years.

A few observers have recently tried to present a sunnier weather report. In late 1994, for example, in a front page story in the *New York Times*, Sylvia Nasar claimed that wage changes during the early 1990s appear to suggest a turnaround, with the majority of new jobs paying above-average wages. "As a result," she concluded, "average hourly pay for all employees, adjusted for inflation, is slowly rising."

The source of Nasar's conclusions is not hard to find. Unlike the data presented in Figure 1, which cover production and nonsupervisory employees, Nasar was looking at wage trends for *all* workers, including top-level executives whose total compensation has continued to soar straight through the early 1990s. Those of us who have long pointed to the wage squeeze have never denied that the top 10 percent to 20 percent of the earnings distribution has fared much better than everyone else. Nasar was proclaiming a penetrating glimpse into the obvious—that many nonproduction and supervisory employees, especially at the top, have continued to enjoy rising hourly compensation.

On balance, I think there's little doubt that these have been rough times for the vast majority of U.S. workers. For the past two decades, more and more workers have had to adjust their expectations, reconciling themselves to toil at

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what are sometimes derisively called "McJobs." Data from the Current Population Survey over the period from 1979 to 1993 show that it was indeed the entire bottom 80 percent of wage earners, not just the poor and disadvantaged, who experienced actual real wage decline.

We can also look at wages by race. While blacks fared less well than whites, what is nonetheless striking is that the vast majority of whites as a group were almost as adversely affected; for the bottom 80 percent of white workers, as well, real hourly wages declined between 1979 and 1993.

The one major exception to the trends involved patterns by gender. While the bottom 80 percent of male workers experienced devastating declines in the real hourly earnings, the bottom 80 percent of women workers actually enjoyed modest real wage growth, with a net increase from 1979 to 1993. This discrepancy is one of the most interesting stories of the 1980s—which unfortunately I cannot explore here.

We can look, finally, at wage trends by levels of education. Only those with a college degree or better were able to gain some measure of protection against the unfriendly winds over the past fifteen years. And the most recent trends have been harsh even for that group. From 1989 to 1993, for example, male workers with just a college degree, but no postgraduate education, were hit with declining real earnings.

It's fair to conclude that the wage squeeze has assumed epidemic proportions. But then we must ask: in a globalizing economy with intensifying import competition, may we assume that this pressure has affected workers in the other advanced countries as well?

Quite to the contrary, the most striking conclusion that emerges from comparing wage trends in the advanced countries is how isolated, how unusual the U.S. case has been. Careful compilations by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics allow us to compare wage trends across twelve of the leading advanced economies.

Figure 2 provides one glimpse into this comparison. It presents the annual average percentage change in real hourly compensation for all manufacturing employees in the United States (on the far right) and in eleven other advanced economies over the period from 1973 through 1993. Wage stagnation in the United States stands out like a sore thumb. It is the only country with wage change close to zero. Only two other countries—Canada and Denmark—feature wage growth rates of less than 1.5 percent a year. Workers in Japan and Germany, our two major trading competitors, fared markedly better than U.S. workers, with real wage growth at 2.2 percent and 3.1 percent respectively. Indeed, the average for the other eleven countries is 2.1 percent per year, seven times more rapid than for the United States over the same period. (I recognize that unemployment rates have been higher in many of these countries than in the United States; this, too, is part of the story that I can't explore here but discuss at length in my forthcoming book.)

The conclusion seems fairly clear. Most U.S. workers have been experiencing a wage squeeze, with real hourly take-home pay in 1994 falling back to the levels of the late 1960s. This wage collapse has affected not only the unskilled and disadvantaged but a remarkably wide spectrum of employees. And the vise has tightened on workers' earnings much more severely in the United States than in other advanced economies.

Those who've experienced the vise most directly have no illusions about the consequences. A union activist in the labor struggles at Caterpillar in Illinois last year looked down the road toward the turn of the millennium and saw hardship: "If we don't put an end to this drift of the country to drive wages down," he said, "there's no future for my three boys. There will be an upper class and a lower class, and I know where [my boys] will be."

The Bureaucratic Burden

More than a decade ago I participated in a small roundtable discussion on "The Ailing Economy" sponsored by the *New York Times*. The other two participants were Felix G. Rohatyn, senior partner in the Wall Street firm Lazard Frères; and Walter B. Wriston, then chair of Citicorp and Citibank—not the sort of company I usually keep. Our discussion roamed widely over the economy's problems in the early 1980s and al-

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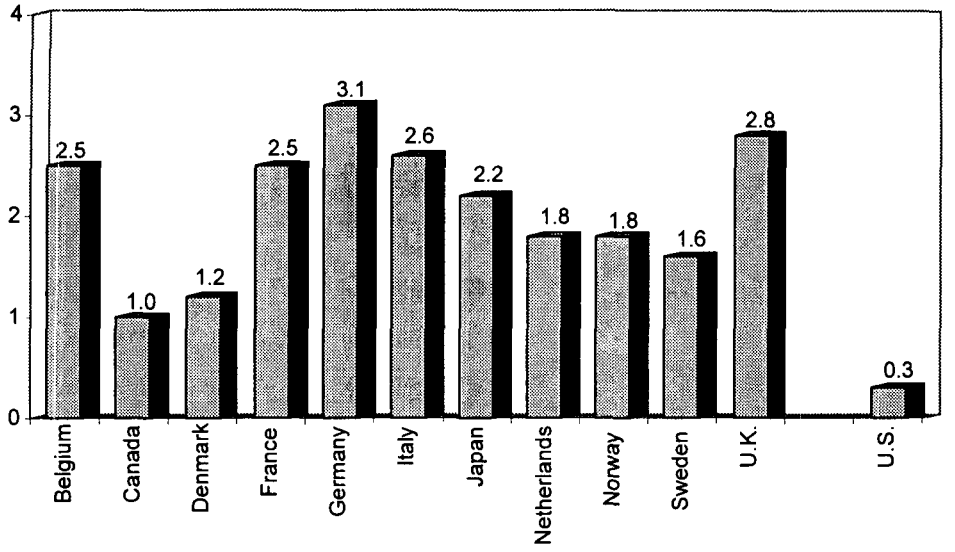
Fig. 2. U.S. Wages Lagging Behind

Percent change, real hourly compensation, all manufacturing employees, 1973-93



ternative prescriptions for their solution.

When we were talking about some of the structural sources of stagnant productivity in the U.S. economy, I pointed to the mammoth size of U.S. corporate bureaucracies. I cited some recent management consultant studies that had suggested that as many as 50 percent of corporate management and supervisory personnel were simply redundant, pure fat that could be trimmed without loss of productiveness.

I assumed that my co-participants would rise to the bait, defending the citadels of U.S. capitalism. But they scarcely batted an eyelash. "I wouldn't know" if expenditures for executive personnel are "wasted," Walter Wriston replied. He followed by joking: "The chances are [that] half of it is. [Figuring out] which half is the difficult problem."

I call it the "bureaucratic burden"—the massive size and cost of the managerial and supervisory apparatus of private U.S. corporations. It's the dirty secret of the U.S. economy.

In 1994, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 17.3 million private nonfarm employees worked in nonproduction and supervisory jobs—mostly as managers and supervisors at all levels of the corporate hierarchy. This was almost as many employees as those working in the entire public sector, in all occupations at all levels of government.

At least as stunning is the amount of money we pay to cover the salaries and benefits of these executives and supervisors. In 1994 nonproduction and supervisory employees in the private nonfarm sector were paid $1.3 trillion in total compensation. This accounted for almost a quarter of all national income. Twenty cents of every dollar we paid for goods and services went to cover the salaries and benefits of the corporate bureaucracy.

Who are all these millions of managers and supervisors? We can look to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' surveys of households, which provide more detailed occupational breakdowns, for some important clues.

In 1993, according to these data, 16.6 million worked in various occupations labeled as either "managerial" or "supervisory." Of these 16.6 million, roughly three-fifths worked as managers and two-fifths as supervisors. Not only the supervisors but also the bulk of the managers are directly or indirectly involved in overseeing and

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monitoring the work of their subordinates.

How is it possible that so many people spend at least some of their time bossing others? The basic principle is simple. If a labor-management system relies on hierarchical principles for managing and supervising its front-line employees on the shop and office floors, then it needs more than just the front-line supervisors who directly oversee these workers. Who keeps the supervisors honest? What guarantees that those supervisors won't be in cahoots with their charges? In such a hierarchy, you need supervisors to supervise the supervisors . . . and supervisors above them. . .and managers to watch the higher-level supervisors . . . and higher-level managers to watch the lower-level managers.

We get some feel for this pyramid effect from Elinor Langer's classic 1970 article about her brief career as a customer sales representative in the New York Telephone Company:[1]

> [My supervisor] is the supervisor of five women. She reports to a Manager who manages four supervisors (about twenty women) and he reports to the District Supervisor along with two other managers . . . A job identical in rank to that of the district supervisor is held by four other men in Southern Manhattan alone. They report to the Chief of the Southern Division, himself a soldier in an army of division chiefs.

It could be, of course, that this massive bureaucratic burden is part of the cost of doing business in a sophisticated, increasingly globalized economy. Perhaps it is inevitable that we need legions of managers and supervisors to oversee complex production systems, spur product and process innovations, conquer markets at home and abroad, and plan for the future.

One obvious way to test this hunch, once again, is to pursue international comparisons. By the early 1980s, it was widely perceived that large corporations in other leading economies such as Germany and Japan were competing at least as effectively in global markets as U.S. firms. Were their bureaucratic armies as massive as ours?

We can compare the percentage of nonfarm employment in managerial and administrative occupations for the United States and for three other advanced economies—Japan, Germany, and Sweden—which are widely regarded as representing different approaches to corporate organization and labor management. Because the employment share of nonproduction workers is sensitive to the business cycle, I focus on 1989, the most recent year in which all four economies were more or less at their business cycle peaks.

The data suggest some dramatic differences between U.S. corporations and their competitors. Thirteen percent of total nonfarm employees in the United States in 1989 worked in managerial and administrative occupations. By this measure, our corporate bureaucratic burden in 1989 had reached more than three times the levels of Japan and Germany and more than four times the level of Sweden. (I might add that among twelve of the leading advanced economies, the United States also has substantially the highest bureaucratic burden.)

According to these International Labor Organization (ILO) comparisons, there were fifteen million managers and administrators in the nonfarm sector in the United States in 1989. If the Japanese proportions had applied in the United States, there would have been only 4.7 million in that occupational group. If the Swedish percentage had applied, only 3.1 million would have worked at that level. Almost twelve million workers would have been freed up to perform different kinds of tasks.

When did our corporations begin to put on so much weight? Twenty years ago I didn't have a clue. In the mid-1970s, colleagues and I began to get involved in outreach educational work with local union officials and rank-and-file workers. Since this early work came on the heels of the sharp recession of 1973-1975 and in the throes of that strange new phenomenon called "stagflation," we expected that the workers in our classes would steer the conversations toward problems of job security and inflation.

Much to our surprise, they were more interested in talking about problems they were constantly experiencing with their bosses on the job. They complained that their supervisors were always on their case, that bureaucratic harassment was a daily burden.

This led me to look for the first time at some of the data I have presented here. Figure 3 traces

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the percentage of nonproduction and supervisory workers in total private nonfarm employment. It shows that in 1948 it began at a postwar low of 12 percent of all private nonfarm employees working in nonproduction and supervisory jobs. It increased substantially as the postwar period progressed, leveling off at roughly 19 percent in the 1980s. At that point almost one in five private nonfarm wage-and-salary employees were employed as managers and supervisors of one sort or another.

The trends revealed by international comparisons show a similar pattern. Here, with the ILO data, we can only go back as far as 1960. Table 1 traces changes in the bureaucratic burden for Germany, Japan, Sweden, and the United States over the decades since 1960, allowing us to glimpse when and how the huge gap between the United States and the other three countries emerged.

In 1960 the United States had the highest share of managerial and administrative employees, but the gap was not particularly pronounced. But then the bureaucratic burden in the United States began to grow quite steadily. At the same time, the managerial and administrative shares in the other three countries remained relatively flat. In Sweden it scarcely changed; in Germany it remained quite low until a bit of growth in the 1980s; and in Japan it actually increased some through 1980 and then declined. In no other country do we find anything like the U.S. pattern of steady expansion, much less the massive levels that the U.S. bureaucratic burden eventually reached.

If we look back at the trends portrayed for the United States in Figure 3 more closely, it appears that there are two phases in the general rise of the bureaucratic burden. In the first phase, the share of nonproduction/supervisory employees grew rapidly through the late 1950s and then somewhat more slowly during the 1960s. A second phase appears to have emerged as the economy began recovering from the recession of 1973-1975. The bureaucratic burden experienced a new upward burst, a new moment of more rapid growth, increasing from 17 percent in 1973 to 19 percent in 1982 before leveling off in the 1980s.

This was a period in which U.S. corporations began to adopt a much more aggressive stance toward their workers and toward trade unions, a period in which "an alternate nonunion system of industrial relations," to quote from an important study by Kochan, Katz, and McKersie, was beginning to emerge.[2] And this was the period, indeed, in which some observers began to note the bulge around the corporate middle. By the mid-1980s, the paunch was protruding. Peter Drucker commented around this time, "Middle managements today tend to be overstaffed to the point of obesity . . . . A good many businesses, large and small, [have become] equally bureaucratic and equally suffer from gross weight around the midriff."

The story doesn't end with the 1980s. Since the beginning of the 1990-1991 recession we've been hearing a lot about corporate "downsizing." We've read that corporations are paring their managerial staffs, that they're becoming "lean

Table 1. Taking on Weight

Administrative and managerial employees as percent of nonfarm employment

	1960	1970	1980	1989
Germany	2.6	2.5	2.8	3.9
Japan	3.9	5.9	5.2	4.2
Sweden	2.1	2.6	2.9	2.6
U.S.	6.6	8.7	11.4	13.0
Ratio, U.S. to average of other three	**2.3**	**2.4**	**3.1**	**3.6**

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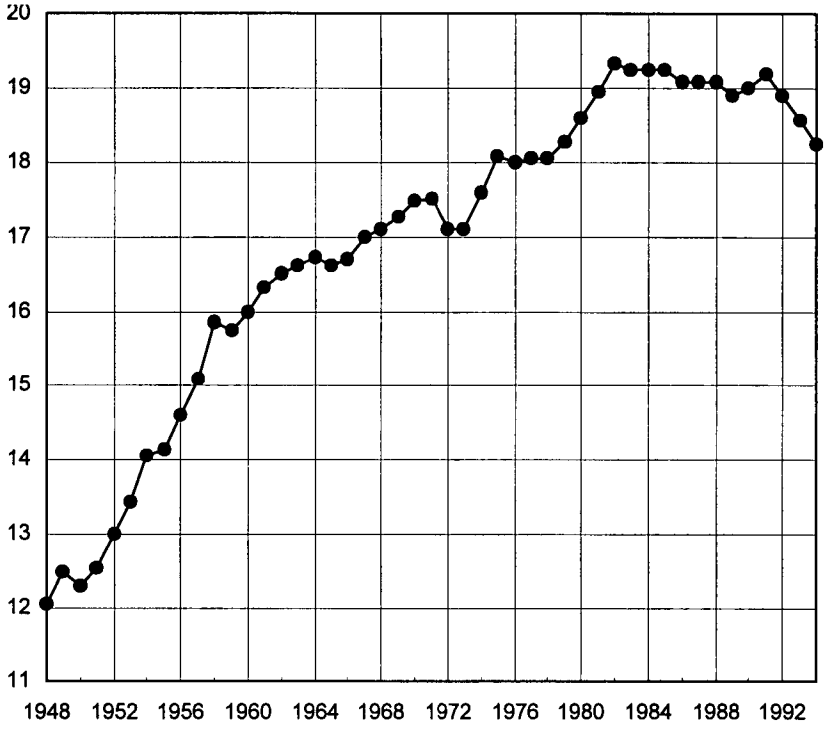
Fig. 3. The Bureaucratic Burden Rises

Nonproduction and supervisory employees as percent of total private nonfarm sector, 1948-94



and mean."

It is true that many managers and supervisors have been laid off in recent years. But all these stories do not by themselves establish that the problem of corporate downsizing is being addressed. They do not even establish, indeed, that the weight of the bureaucratic burden itself is being reduced. Hundreds of thousands of production and nonsupervisory employees have also been fired or laid off in recent years. The story of the bureaucratic burden is primarily a story of *relative* overweight, of the proportion of total employment in managerial and supervisory jobs.

What matters most, in short, is whether or not corporate "downsizing" in the past several years has actually reduced the bureaucratic burden itself. Here, we can concentrate on employment changes from 1988 to 1993—the period over which stories of downsizing have been most widely reported. What happened to the managerial employment share over those years?

Judging from the household survey data, it would appear that the requiem for middle management has been premature. In 1989, "executive, administrative, and managerial" workers accounted for 12.6 percent of private nonfarm employment. Between 1989 and 1995, however, employment in this category accounted for almost one quarter of total net employment growth. As a result, the share of managers in total private nonfarm employment has *increased* over those six years, to roughly 13.6 percent, rather than declining as the recurring and sometimes sensational stories have implied.

If U.S. corporations were already suffering by the mid-1980s "from gross overweight around the midriff," should we conclude that they had solved their problems once the bureaucratic burden reached a more or less level plateau? That would be like saying that a man of 350 pounds no longer suffered from obesity because he had stopped gaining weight. A fat corporation is still a fat corporation.

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The Stagnant Wages/Bloated Corporations Connection

Now I want to turn to the most important part of my argument—that the wage squeeze and the bureaucratic burden are integrally connected, that each contributed heavily to the other. Stagnant wages contribute to the need for legions of managers and supervisors, *and* top-heavy corporate bureaucracies have a dramatically dampening effect on production-worker earnings.

Let me first consider the connection running from stagnant wages to top-heavy corporate bureaucracies. Across the advanced capitalist economies, there appear to be two fairly different types of systems of capital-labor relations, reflecting sharply contrasting approaches to managing production workers and encouraging productive performance. One approach features relatively cooperative labor-management relations—including a large degree of employment security, positive wage incentives, often with a fair amount of employee involvement and also with strong unions. The other builds upon much more conflictual labor-management relations—relatively little employment security, reliance on the threat of job dismissal as a goad to workers, rarely providing strong wage incentives, sometimes featuring weak unions. One system relies on the carrot, the other on the stick. Germany, Sweden, and Japan provide examples of the former approach—even though there are important differences among their labor-management systems. And, as many have pointed out in recent years, the United States tends to represent the archetype of the latter system, joined by the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia.

Now, what about wages and bureaucracies? One of the principal carrots of the cooperative approach is the promise of relatively reliable increases in real earnings, with implicit if not formally bargained sharing of dividends from rapid productivity growth between owners and workers. These wage incentives reinforce other dimensions of the cooperative approach, such as strong employment security. And when those incentives are in place, workers seem to be able to coordinate many of their own activities in production, relieving their corporate owners of the need for intensive supervision.

With the less cooperative approach, a basic conflict over workers' labor effort is likely to persist. In the absence of strong wage benefits and employment security, what provides the workers with the incentive to work hard? Conflictual systems are likely to rely on legions of stick-wielders, supervisors and managers saddled with the responsibility for ensuring that production and nonsupervisory workers don't "shirk," as many economists call it, slacking off on the job every time one of their bosses turns his or her head.

Once the supervisory workers are in place, they acquire a hierarchical logic all their own. Robert H. Hayes and Steven C. Wheelwright, from the Harvard and Stanford business schools respectively, analyze this tendency:[3]

> Since managers usually feel that the number of people reporting to them ought to be less than some maximum number (generally 8 to 12), organizations tend to grow like pyramids: as the base of the pyramid (representing the number of workers) grows, so does the number of layers of managers—each of whom probably requires at least one support person (a secretary, assistant, etc.). As the number of layers in the management hierarchy grows, communication and coordination becomes more difficult, so additional support personnel are required.

There is empirical support for this basic linkage between conflictual labor-management systems and top-heavy corporations. For example, I have found evidence suggesting that among sixteen advanced economies, the more conflictual the labor-management system, the higher the percentage of managers and administrators. Cooperative systems don't need so many bosses.

What about the connection running in the opposite direction? Why would top-heavy corporations tend to create downward pressure on production workers' earnings?

Once top-down bureaucracies are in place, they tend to acquire an expansionary dynamic—one might even call it the "iron law of bureaucracies." In order to justify a superior's authority over a subordinate, salary differentials become important. The greater the number of bureaucratic layers, the greater the number of sal-

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ary differentials that system must sustain. And if top-level executives quite naturally try to push up their salaries, they typically find that they have to allow for upward creep in the salaries of their managerial and supervisory subordinates as well.

As a result, there is a strong tendency in top-down bureaucratic hierarchies for steady increases in total compensation to managerial and supervisory personnel. In the immediate post-war era, with rapid productivity growth, U.S. corporations could absorb many of these growing costs of doing business bureaucratically. But since the 1960s, as productivity growth has slowed, corporate budgets have less easily afforded such costs. And with intensifying global competition, it would be dangerous to try to pass these costs on to the consumer through higher prices.

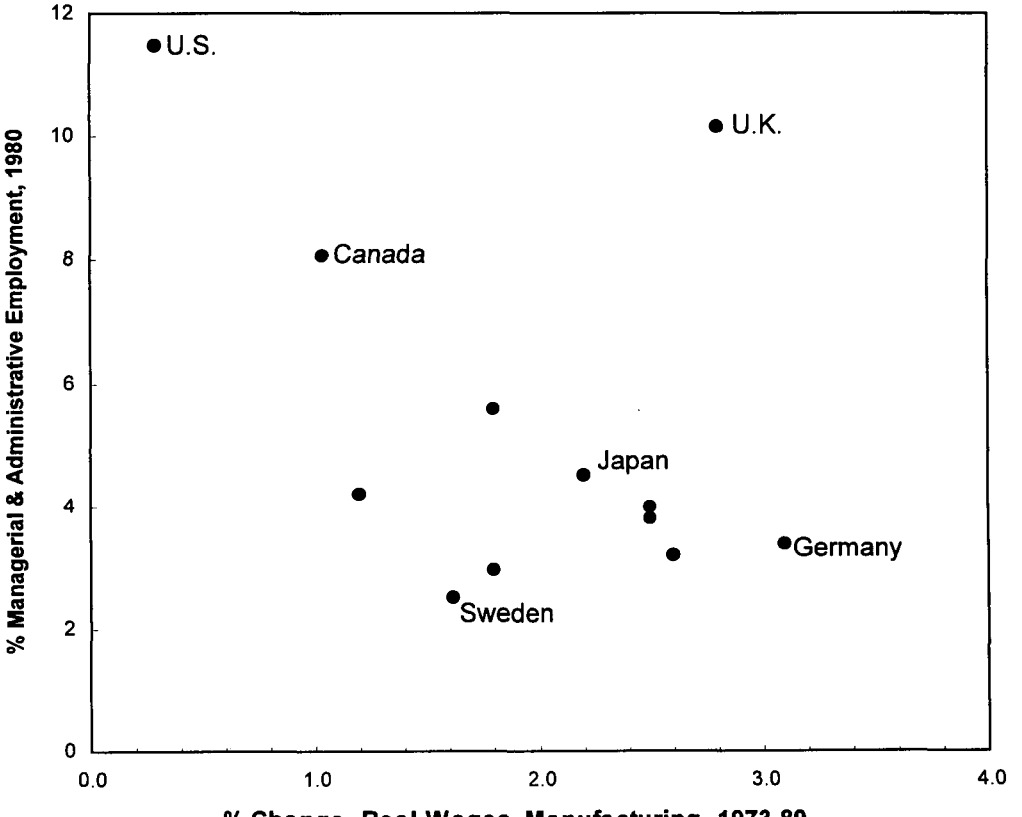
As a result, if managerial and supervisory compensation was to continue to grow, it had to come principally out of investment funds or production workers' earnings. And both targets seem to have suffered body blows: net investment has stagnated and so have workers' earnings.

In an economy with stronger unions, workers could presumably have resisted this squeeze. But the past twenty years have also witnessed a shrinkage and a weakening of U.S. trade unions.

And so there has been a massive income shift—within the total category of wage-and-salary employee compensation—from production/nonsupervisory earnings to nonproduction/supervisory salaries. I estimate that between 1973 and 1993 this distributional shift amounted to roughly 8 percent of total national income.

Thus, stagnant wages contribute to the creation and reproduction of top-heavy corporate bureaucracies *and* top-heavy corporate bureaucracies contribute to strong downward pressure on wages.

Fig. 4. Corporate Bureaucracies and Real Wage Growth



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These are simple but fairly strong hypotheses. It is not at all easy to test them, because there are many influences on wage growth and many influences on bureaucratic staffing requirements. But I ought at least to be able to find evidence that there is an inverse relationship between the two. Where the stick strategy prevails, the bureaucratic burden should be relatively high and real wage growth relatively stagnant. Where a more cooperative approach to labor management holds sway, the bureaucratic burden should be lower and real wage growth more rapid.

It's not easy to find evidence of this relationship within the United States because the stick strategy is so pervasive among firms and across industries. A test across the advanced countries seems more important. Do we find that stagnant wage growth is associated with top-heavier corporate bureaucracies? Figure 4 presents some basic data exploring that relationship. The horizontal axis presents the same data as in Figure 2, the average annual real wage change for all employees in manufacturing between 1973 and 1989. The vertical axis represents the percentage of total nonfarm employees working in administrative and managerial occupations in 1980. (1980 is used here in order to provide a measure for the level of bureaucratic burden that lies in the middle of the time period being examined.)

Except for the single case of the United Kingdom, there is a fairly strong negative association between the bureaucratic burden and real wage growth. As anticipated, the United States stands out for its swollen bureaucratic burden and for its virtually flat real wage growth. If the United Kingdom is removed momentarily on the grounds that it seems to be so anomalous, the simple correlation between the two variables is -0.78 (statistically significant at 1 percent).

It may make the most sense, further, to think of the countries as falling into two groups—rather than falling on a continuum. One group, including Germany, Japan, Sweden, and six other countries, clusters in the lower right corner of the graph. (The one country in this group with relatively slower real wage growth is Denmark; many economists view Denmark's system of labor-management relations as a kind of hybrid case, with a mix of cooperative and conflictual features that result in higher inflation and unemployment than in most of the more cooperative examples.) The United States and Canada, two of the three more adversarial economies represented here, lie in the upper left. Only the United Kingdom departs substantially from this pattern.

Why is the United Kingdom so anomalous? Although the United Kingdom does feature sharply conflictual labor relations, as befitting its high relative bureaucratic burden, many of its unions have remained strong and have been able to sustain rapid real wage growth nonetheless. The costs of these anomalously rapid wage gains appear to have been rising unemployment and declining competitive advantage. The chickens might have come home to roost much earlier—perhaps resulting in slower real wage growth—had Britain's real wage growth not been greased by the steady flow of oil from its North Sea oil fields. With the black stuff oozing from the sea throughout most of this period, the U.K. economy could continue to live beyond the means, as it were, to which its production system would otherwise have condemned it.

With this one exception, however, the remaining countries seem to support the hypothesis. It is not just that the United States has the slowest real wage growth and the most top-heavy corporate bureaucracies among these leading economies. More generally, those with the most rapid real wage growth appear to be able to get by with the least burdensome corporate bureaucracies. The cost of all these carrots appears to be offset by savings in managerial and supervisory salaries.

Consequences, Counter-Arguments, and Policy Implications

I will close with some final observations about consequences, counter-arguments, and policy implications.

First, consequences. The combination of stagnant wages and bloated corporate bureaucracies has two main effects:

- The wage squeeze continues to have devastating effects on the well-being of the vast majority of U.S. households. It has exacerbated poverty, created pressure on living standards, and forced millions to work more jobs or longer

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hours. It's the most important source of many of the spreading social problems confronting the United States.

• The slightly less obvious effect is macroeconomic. Labor-management systems relying on the stick appear to be more costly and less effective than those relying on the carrot. For example, recent studies have provided suggestive evidence that, controlling for other factors such as capital intensity, those economies with more cooperative systems of labor relations *also* have more rapid productivity growth rates. And with more rapid productivity growth, there is room for financing more productive investments, for affording more rapid wage growth, and for maintaining a competitive edge in the global economy.

About counter-arguments. There are many possible causes of wage stagnation and many possible explanations of the wage squeeze with which I'm less than fully sympathetic.

One attributes it to the so-called "skills mismatch," to a rising demand for highly skilled workers. But recent work casts very serious doubt on that as a sufficient or even as a very persuasive explanation; changing labor-management relations seem to have been much more important.

Another attributes the wage squeeze to intensifying global competition, especially from low-wage developing countries. Here too, though the phenomenon is certainly real, the contribution of global competition to the wage squeeze is probably quite weak. In this regard I'm sympathetic to recent arguments by Paul Krugman and Robert Lawrence, among others, who point out that wage stagnation in the United States is at least as pronounced in "non-tradable" sectors that are not exposed to global competition and that present evidence that intensifying global competition has contributed fairly little to wage stagnation in the United States. This does not necessarily imply, as Krugman and Lawrence insist, that we should pursue "free trade" policies; there are many grounds on which to prefer "managed trade."

Finally, on policy implications: my argument obviously suggests that attacking these problems will be far from easy. Those of us who decry the wage squeeze will apparently have to tackle not only that problem but also the interconnected issue of top-heavy corporate hierarchies. And those of us who are similarly offended by corporate waste need to pay attention to the need for alternative systems of wage compensation and incentives.

But there are places to start. If I had my druthers, I would endorse three initiatives:

• We need a sharp increase in the minimum wage. This would create upward pressure on wages, push corporations to make more effective use of their employees, *and*, presumably, create stronger counter-pressure to the expansionary push for more and better-paid corporate bureaucrats. And for those who worry about the possibly negative employment consequences of such a move, the recent work of David Card and Alan Krueger provides striking evidence that recent increases in the minimum wage did not have employment-displacing effects.[4]

• We need substantial changes in labor law to make it much easier for employees to form unions. Based on the most recent survey data, thirty million U.S. private-sector workers who are not now union members would prefer union representation to their present circumstances. Some simple procedural changes, such as automatic union certification upon an ample majority's signing declaration cards, could make a huge difference in the United States. And stronger unions are a necessary though hardly sufficient antidote to the problems I've been reviewing here.

• We need strong positive investment incentives to firms with more democratic labor relations and less top-heavy systems of corporate management. These incentives could be provided through the tax system or through special investment banks set up for these purposes. It wouldn't be easy to define the kinds of systems and changes that would warrant subsidy and support, but it wouldn't be beyond our reach either.

I will close with a simple quotation from a not entirely likely source, John Stuart Mill. In his *Principles of Political Economy*, almost one hundred and fifty years ago, he wrote:[5]

> Even in the best state which society has yet reached, it is lamentable to think how great a pro-

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portion of all the efforts and talents in the world are employed in merely neutralizing one another. It is the proper end of government to reduce this wretched waste to the smallest possible amount, by taking such measures as shall cause the energies now spent by mankind in injuring one another . . . to be turned to the legitimate employment of human faculties, that of compelling the powers of nature to be more and more subservient to physical and moral good. □

This article is based on a lecture presented on the occasion of the inauguration of the Dorothy H. Hirshon Professorship of Economics at the New School for Social Research in New York City, April 5, 1995, and on material from *Fat and Mean: The Corporate Squeeze of Working Americans and the Myth of Managerial "Downsizing,"* by David M. Gordon. Copyright ©1996 by David M. Gordon. Reprinted by permission of Martin Kessler Books at The Free Press, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc. Documentation and sources for all data in this piece are provided in the book.

Notes

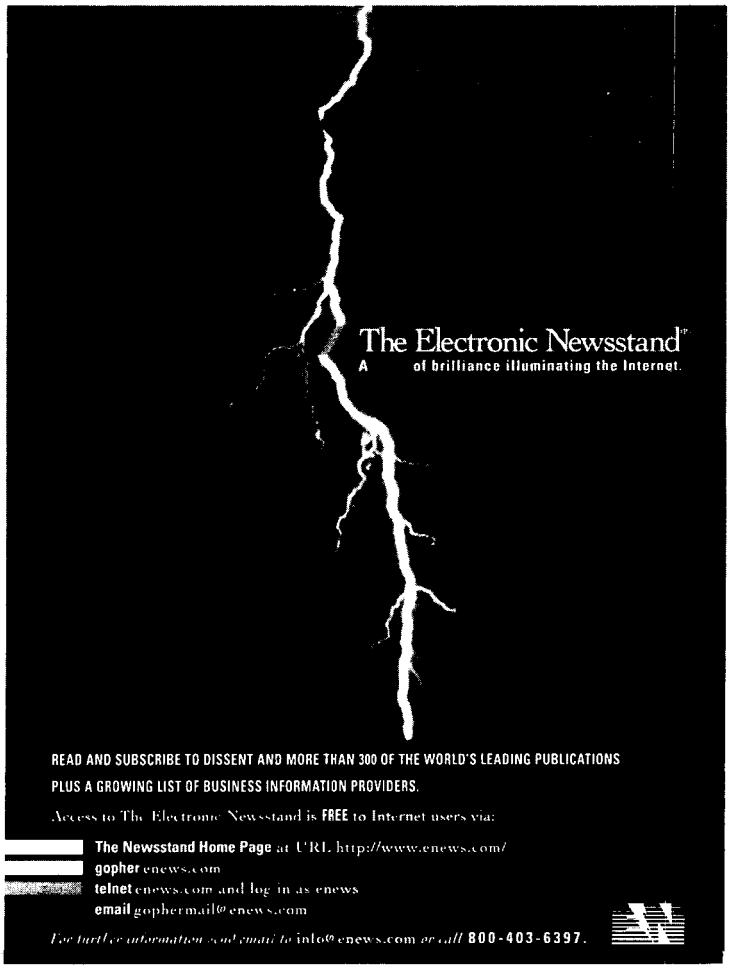
[1] Elinor Langer, "The Women of the Telephone Company," *New York Review of Books*, March 12, 1970, p. 16.

[2] Thomas A. Kochan, Harry C. Katz, and Robert B. McKersie, *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell ILR Press, 1994), p. 47.

[3] Robert H. Hayes and Steven C. Wheelwright, *Restoring Our Competitive Edge: Competing Through Manufacturing* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1984), pp. 62-63.

[4] David Card and Alan B. Krueger, *Myth and Measurement: The New Economics of the Minimum Wage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[5] John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* [1848] (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1920), p. 979. I am grateful to Maurizio Franzini and Samuel Bowles for bringing this quote to my attention.



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Thomas Carothers

PROMOTING DEMOCRACY IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

I was in Kazakhstan not long ago, on a project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development to assist the Kazakh Parliament with its drafting of an electoral law. The trip was going smoothly until a critical moment occurred. I was working closely with a senior member of the Parliament, a wise and patient man who approached his work with great seriousness. I had just reviewed a number of provisions of the draft law and highlighted some choices open to his drafting committee. He looked at me gravely, pushing slowly aside with one hand the raft of possibilities I had been outlining, and stated with quiet firmness, "We want our Parliament to be just like your Congress." Our eyes met for a meaningful moment as I tried to think of something to say other than the three words that had immediately come screaming into my mind: "No, you don't!" I mumbled something to the effect that our Congress was in fact not perfect, that there was much value in exploring a range of ways to organize legislatures and draft laws. My host's eyes narrowed as he listened to my words, words that I knew sounded like evasion. The American expert has come all this way to say he has no model?

Among those Americans involved in the business of promoting democracy abroad—a minor growth industry populated by people from non-governmental organizations, consulting firms, think tanks, universities, and the U.S. government itself, who careen around the world helping to draft constitutions, observe elections, reform judiciaries, strengthen parliaments, build civil societies, empower local governments, and train journalists—the relation between the proffered ideal and the actual state of democracy at home is rarely much discussed. As a result, little attention has been given to the surprising and in some ways paradoxical fact that the United States, and to a lesser extent Western Europe, have moved into a particularly active phase of promoting democracy in other countries precisely at a time when the health of their own democratic systems is clouded with doubt.

It would be too much to say that democracy is in a state of crisis in the United States or Western Europe. But it is unquestionably troubled. Leaving aside the many serious social problems in the United States and the continuing inability of Western European economies to create jobs, one can point to a set of interrelated political problems in many well-established democracies. Political parties command increasingly feeble loyalty from citizens. The ruling politicians seem in most Western democracies either to be a stagnant gang of old faces or a series of one-term leaders who go rapidly from incoming boom to outgoing bust. Political participation has weakened and taken on superficial, commercialized forms. In general, the political sphere is often no longer much respected or valued. Antipolitical personalities and ideas have growing appeal, with the underside of antipolitics often not far from antidemocracy.

Very little of this vague but troubling situation appears in the world of U.S. democracy promotion programs abroad. What gets presented in such programs is generally a high school civics version of democracy. Democracy is portrayed as a gleaming edifice made up of larger-than-life institutions and structures. It is also characterized as a self-evident truth, with the resulting assumption that democratic values,

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once properly introduced, will take hold naturally and cement into perpetuity the proper institutional system. This view admits that a few problems may be found in the practice of democracy in the United States, but such problems are only wrinkles around the edges that do not raise questions about the core.

In U.S. assistance programs on political party development, for example, I have gotten used to watching the visiting American experts diagnose the shortcomings of the party systems of the host countries. They shake their heads smilingly but sadly at the proliferation of parties that has followed the initial ascent into democracy. They devise strategies to reduce those unworkable proliferations into two- or three-party systems, in which parties are to be defined by mild ideological shadings rather than along potentially explosive religious, ethnic, or regional lines. Yet I never hear the American experts seriously explore the waning legitimacy and significance of political parties in the well-established two- or three-party systems in the West. The juxtaposition of the absolute confidence with which the U.S. party model is presented and the parlous state of our own parties is remarkable. Similarly, I have observed many parliamentary assistance programs in which U.S. experts help foreign parliamentarians revise their committee systems, train their staff, improve their information services, or even hold mock congressional hearings, all to help mold their legislatures in the form of the U.S. Congress. Yet I have never witnessed a detailed presentation on why the U.S. Congress has performed so poorly over the past ten years, why it is held in such low regard by many Americans, and how parliaments in transitional societies might avoid its shortcomings.

I do not mean to say that we have nothing to offer the world, that the deficiencies of our own democracy disqualify us from venturing out into the world to help others make their societies more democratic. But it does seem that we are promoting democracy in ways that are habitually two-dimensional and even disingenuous. This may in part be due to our understandable desire to be positive. One hates to disembark in a newly democratizing country and immediately disgorge a heavy load of bad news about all the difficulties that lie ahead. It also probably reflects the fact that those directly involved in promoting democracy tend to be a relatively homogeneous group of people who have done fairly well by democracy in the United States and are less immediately aware of or affected by its shortcomings than many others might be.

But the main cause of the persistent disjunction between realities at home and ideals abroad is something else. To the extent that democracy promoters concern themselves with the fact that all is not well with democracy in America and Western Europe, they assume that such problems are the symptoms of "mature democracies" and that prior to the current malaise in Western politics there was a long, golden period in which democracy enjoyed its fruition. Their related assumption is that the many newly democratizing countries around the world will experience a similar pattern of development. First these countries will build the basic institutions of democracy, then they will live out their own golden periods, and only after they are far down the democratic road will the various elements of the democratic malaise affecting the West be relevant to them. Stated in more conceptual terms, the view is that Western political life is in a transition to some ill-defined postmodern state and that its strains are characteristic features of this emergent postmodernism. The newly democratizing countries, in contrast, are at a prior stage—they are striving to become modern. They must grapple with modernism before they need worry about postmodernism. They must learn to walk, in other words, before they need worry about stumbling.

One obvious criticism of this outlook is that there never was a golden period of democracy in the United States or in other Western countries; all periods of Western democracy have been fraught with problems. Yet although it is true that democracy has always been highly imperfect, the problems outlined above do appear to reflect a distinct syndrome of postmodern fatigue with democracy—and perhaps with politics itself.

The deeper flaw of this outlook lies with the notion that the postmodern fatigue is a narrow political phenomenon based on the experience of life in developed Western democracies. In fact

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the symptoms of postmodern fatigue are just one part of a much broader social, intellectual, and political trend that has penetrated societies in different stages of political development in many parts of the world, particularly Latin America and the formerly communist world. The core psychological components of the shift from modernism to postmodernism—the movement from alienation to detachment, from irony to cynicism, and from the loss of meaning to the loss of interest in meaning—are hardly limited to Western democracies. Nor are the basic sociopolitical elements: the technologically fueled evolution of individualism, the growing fascination with putatively apolitical solutions to political problems, and the tendency to view political choices as a derivative of economic frameworks rather than the reverse.

Thus the many democratic transitions of recent years in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union, and possibly even Africa and Asia, may seem at first glance like efforts by other societies to achieve the plateau of Western political modernism. In fact, however, they are much more complex transitions in which societies already suffused with many of the attitudes and ideas of postmodernism are attempting to develop the structures and processes of liberal democracy. They are, in short, learning to walk while they already know intellectually all about stumbling. The idea that in promoting democracy abroad we should put aside for some much later date consideration of the characteristic problems of "mature democracies" is wrong.

Ideological Certainties

In parallel to their tendency to hold out an idealized version of U.S. democracy to foreigners, Americans abroad tend to read into the many democratic transitions of recent years far too much ideological certainty. They often view such transitions as society-wide epiphanies, large-scale conversions to liberal democratic values. This view is tied to the deeper, seductive idea that late-twentieth-century history is defined by the triumph of liberal democracy. Yet the democratic trend in the world, significant as it is, should be understood as much in terms of failure as of triumph.

In Latin America, for example, the region-wide shift from dictatorial regimes to elected, civilian governments in the 1980s was born from the dual failure of right-wing authoritarians to govern effectively and of left-wing movements to win broad credibility. The shift to democracy can scarcely be described in triumphal terms; rather, a region beset with economic woes, corruption, mismanagement, and profound social inequities turned to democracy as the political lender of last resort. In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the engine of political change in the late 1980s was the abject political and economic failure of communism. Similarly, the unexpected democratic trend in Africa of the early 1990s grew out of the prolonged, resounding failure of one-party rule in that continent. Only in East Asia has the democratic trend arisen in societies that have been developing successfully and self-confidently.

With this important but limited exception, therefore, "failure of the alternatives" appears to be a more useful controlling concept than "triumph of an idea" in explaining the widespread democratic trend of recent years. Democracy was certainly a positive choice for many troubled societies, something that some people fought for out of deep conviction. But the democratic trend did not result from a rising ideology outshining an array of vigorous rivals. Instead it was more a process of elimination—as the other ideological choices collapsed, democracy was the only one left standing.

Viewing the democratic trend in this way highlights the fact that the recent political transitions are highly pragmatic, or perhaps more accurately, highly functionalist experiments. People around the world are trying out democracy to see what it can deliver to them. What they want it to deliver depends somewhat on the particular country involved, but material interests usually dominate. They want a life that matches the expectations raised by images of Western prosperity that now circulate so pervasively around the world. They want a government that can accomplish basic tasks with a semblance of competence and honesty. They want to be left alone at the political level but taken care of at the social and economic levels. In supporting democratization they are not so much

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hoping for the establishment of a new, participatory, civic-oriented relationship between citizens and the state as for what might be called the professionalization of the state. They do not dream of humanizing politics so much as of obviating the need for politics itself.

The American tendency to read into recent political transitions around the world too much ideological certainty is reflected in, and causes problems for, U.S. assistance programs aimed at democracy promotion. The problems often begin at the early stage of political transitions, when opposition individuals or groups are challenging existing nondemocratic regimes. In such situations, Americans are quick to assume that anyone challenging a dictatorship is a democrat. They project the simple framework of democracy versus dictatorship upon local power struggles, which, though often concerned with political liberalization, are also closely linked with historical conflicts between different regional, ethnic, or religious factions. They are then surprised when the people they support turn out to be primarily interested in gaining and consolidating power rather than building democracy. And they fail to realize how much the United States is perceived in the countries in which it is engaged as taking sides in historical power struggles rather than advancing the abstract principles of democracy.

These problems continue as democratic transitions proceed. Once the old regime is out and a new government comes to power through elections or general affirmation, U.S. assistance organizations undertake civic education throughout the country. Such programs rest on the idea that the common person in a transitional society yearns for democracy but just doesn't know much about what democracy is. Civic educators funded by the United States fan out through the countryside armed with brochures, pamphlets, charts, and books translated into the local language, which explain what political rights are, what voting is, what parliaments do in democracies, what the separation of powers means, and so on.

But much of this heartfelt educational work assumes away the essential task. It assumes that the people in a transitional society want to become democratic and just need to know more about how to do so. In fact, however, in societies currently in the midst of democratic transitions, many citizens feel a strong skepticism about the utility of politics itself and a disinclination to be stirred by any ideological education, particularly one in which political values are presented as self-evident truths rather than correlated with clear individual interests. Civic educators are dismayed when political apathy follows hard on the heels of initially energizing democratic transitions. Rather than question the tenets of their educational approach they simply prescribe larger doses of the same medicine.

It is not surprising that Americans tend to see the recent wave of political transitions in primarily ideological terms. We are a nation that defines itself through ideology, and we are prone to view the world through our own ideological lens. Nonetheless, in failing to see that many of these transitions reflect as much a spirit of antipolitical functionalism as ideological conviction, we are missing an important connection. An essential feature of the troubled condition of democracy in the United States and Western Europe is precisely that of the rise of apolitical or even antipolitical attitudes. Citizens of these countries increasingly view their political systems not as repositories of value but as service mechanisms to be evaluated only in terms of the material goods they

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deliver. In the established democracies, antipolitical attitudes are eating away at existing systems of liberal democratic governance. In the transitional countries, such attitudes are complicating the efforts to establish democratic systems. In either case, however, the underlying phenomenon is strikingly similar. The fact that Americans tend not to draw this connection highlights the earlier point that they often fail to relate the condition of democracy at home to their understanding of democracy abroad. And the fact that this connection exists means that the political challenges facing democratizing societies are not fundamentally different from those confronted by mature democracies.

A Place in the World

In a broad, metaphorical sense, the manifold efforts by Americans to promote democracy abroad express a basic perception about America's place in the world. And the disjunctions that mark these assistance efforts reflect a deep division built into the common perception. On the one hand, many Americans believe that the world is becoming or should become more like America, and that it is their job to go out in the world to push that process along. Yet at the same time many Americans believe that there is a tremendous gulf between themselves and the world. They believe that America is fundamentally different from other countries; the mere fact of foreignness seems utterly strange, almost unnatural to them.

This division in our idea of our place in the world is rooted in our own national self-conception. We believe that America is a unique country but, at the same time, a universal model. It is unique as the oldest democracy. The idea of America as the "city on the hill" remains surprisingly strong despite the uncertainties that many Americans have about the country's future and the widespread critical view of the actual functioning of its political system. Americans view their country as the self-made miracle that any person or society can emulate with hard work and the right intentions. That there may well be an inherent contradiction between being simultaneously unique and universal seems to escape our notice. Our self-appointed place in the world rests uneasily on the conscious or unconscious denial of that contradiction. But although it is denied, the contradiction has haunted our entire experience of international engagement. It lies behind the disconcerting condition that we know so well of having been highly engaged politically, economically, militarily, and culturally in the world for generations, yet having remained so much an island nation despite it all.

The current historical juncture affords us an opportunity to change our basic psychological relationship to the world. By "juncture" I am referring not only to the end of the cold war but to the full set of transitional features of the international sphere, including the trend toward democracy in many countries, the increasing internationalization of economic systems, and the overly hyped but nonetheless significant "information revolution." We have engaged in much talk about the implications of the end of the cold war and of the other distinctive features of this new period. But the changes we have made in our international outlook have been surprisingly few and generally limited to the level of formal policy modifications. It is the psychological underpinnings of our relationship to the world that must change. Democracy promotion, as a defining metaphor for that relationship, is one place to start.

Within American political culture, pride in the unique stability of America's democratic system has hardened over the generations into a tendency to equate the particular forms of our political institutions with democracy itself. Missing from our political life is much real debate about how our crucial political values, such as representation and pluralism, might be better served by different institutional forms or configurations. In fact, we maintain a remarkable attachment to the particular institutional forms of our democracy, such as our highly flawed Congress, even as the underlying principles upon which they were built atrophy from ill service.

We have been carrying this over-attachment to forms and under-attachment to principles with us when we go abroad promoting

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democracy. We need to concentrate less on helping to reproduce certain institutional forms in other countries and more on fostering the underlying values and principles of democracy. For example, when faced with a dysfunctional parliament in a transitional society we should not immediately think in terms of a checklist of institutional modifications needed to make that parliament resemble our Congress—such as increasing the number of staff, expanding the library, changing the rules of procedure, or strengthening the committee system. Instead, we need to help empower those people and organizations who wish to fight to change the patterns of representation, and let them work out their precise institutional objectives. Or, if we are trying to assist the development of political parties in another country, we should refrain from our habitual tendency to send American political consultants to teach those parties to be U.S.-style political machines replete with media expertise, a penchant for polls, and a winning-is-all approach. Instead, we should try to help stimulate debate and inquiry into the full range of possible types of political association, on the assumption that we do not have the final answer with respect to the forms and functions of political parties.

In short, the challenge of promoting democracy abroad turns out to bear important similarities to the challenge of reinvigorating democracy at home. If we have been falling short in our approaches abroad it is perhaps because we have not been seriously engaged in the task at home. Reconfiguring our relationship to the world in this new international era can only follow from a reconfiguring of our own relationship to the democratic principles and values we espouse. □

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Laurie Shrage

PROSTITUTION AND THE CASE FOR DECRIMINALIZATION

Responses to prostitution from the left have been radically contradictory. Marxist thinkers, for example, are committed to study social phenomena in terms of systems of production and their related labor forms. But they rarely treat prostitution as a kind of work; instead they treat it as a side effect of the moral decay, corruption, or cultural collapse that occurs under particular social conditions. Why? Leftists generally respect working-class people and their political and economic struggles. Yet they rarely exhibit respect toward prostitute organizations or their political activists and intellectuals. For the most part, such groups and individuals are ignored.[1] Again, why?

Many on the left want to believe that prostitution would not exist or would not be common or tolerated in a world free of economic, gender, and sexual exploitation. The problem of prostitution would solve itself once other problems are solved. Yet speculative judgments like this one are abstract and academic. Prostitution isn't any single thing—a unitary social phenomenon with a particular origin—and so it doesn't make sense to argue about whether it would or wouldn't be present in this or that type of society. Working from crosscultural and historical studies, I have examined institutionalized and commodified exchanges of sexual services between women providers and their male customers in many different social contexts.[2] I conclude that there are (or have been) places and times where exchanges of sexual services between women and men are (or were) relatively free of gender and class domination. How then should leftists respond to the varieties of prostitution in the contemporary United States, where the labor practices involved are shaped by pernicious class and gender asymmetries?

I want to argue that we should include in our political agendas the dismantling of the legal and social structures that criminalize prostitution and stigmatize prostitutes. In conjunction with this project, we will need to invent regulatory alternatives to the current punitive systems of control. These are the primary aims of numerous prostitute civil rights and labor groups, and I think both feminists and socialists should support them, though not for the libertarian reasons many representatives of these groups give. Arguments for decriminalizing prostitution can be made by appealing to notions of workers' rights and the dignity of low-status work; they need not appeal to the libertarian ideal of total freedom from governmental intrusion into the lives of presumably independent individuals. These arguments can also be strengthened by accepting a robust pluralism with regard to sexual customs and practices. I don't mean that we cannot criticize sexual practices, only that the criticism must take into account different cultural conceptions of human sexuality and not dismiss out of hand those that are unfamiliar. Again, this desire to understand alien customs should not be confused with a libertarian laissez-faire morality. The libertarian sees sexual desires as a natural force that society should respect; the pluralist understands that desire, including the desire for noncommodified sex, is shaped by cultural and social forces.

Feminist theorists have argued that prostitution involves the sexual and economic subordination, degradation, and exploitation of women and girls. Many forms of prostitution are indeed

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brutal and oppressive: the near slave conditions that have been reported recently in brothels in Thailand, the use of "comfort women" by the Japanese during the Second World War, the prostitution that exists around U.S. military bases and in many contemporary urban spaces ("streetwalking," "massage parlors," "escort services," and so on). Women and girls have been tricked, or physically and economically coerced, into the prostitution business and then kept in it against their will. Women have contracted fatal diseases; they have been beaten and raped. These are common aspects of contemporary prostitution that anyone concerned with social justice must address. But we must also ask whether the legal structures that have been set up to control and discourage prostitution—including voluntary prostitution where it exists—also oppress women. Both women who work as prostitutes and women who are suspected of doing so (usually poor women of color) are frequently harassed, manipulated, and exploited by police officers and others who have power over them. Criminalization contributes to the stigma that prostitutes bear, making them more vulnerable to hate crimes, housing and employment discrimination, and other violations of their basic rights.

Because both the operation of prostitution businesses and their legal suppression typically sacrifice women's interests, feminists generally oppose both prostitution and its criminalization. Many feminists aim to devise nonpunitive, extralegal responses, such as providing other work opportunities. Yet there has been no concerted feminist attempt to undo the laws that define acts of prostitution as criminal offenses and impose penalties on participants—more often the female vendors than the male customers. Certainly feminist groups have not given the decriminalization of prostitution the same priority they have given to other issues, such as ensuring the legality of abortion, reforming rape and sexual harassment laws, and desegregating corporate management and the professions. Moreover, feminists have been more vocal in opposing sex businesses than the laws that criminalize the activities of commercial providers, and thus have contributed to creating a climate conducive to the continued degradation of prostitutes.

Feminists have not mobilized around the decriminalization of prostitution because of our lingering ambivalence about the subject. Some question whether commodified exchanges of sexual services are ever voluntary and regard prostitutes always as manipulated victims rather than autonomous agents—a view that requires us to second guess the motives, desires, and values of all prostitutes. Other feminists argue for decriminalizing only the prostitute's work while maintaining the criminal status of pimping, pandering, and so on. But this requires the state to determine which of the prostitute's partners are exploiting her and which are not—unless we wish to punish all the prostitute's possible business partners, including her spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend, parents and siblings, and other comrades.

Although feminists are fully aware of the varieties of abuse prostitutes suffer, many of them fear that decriminalization will lead to more prostitution and thus more exploitation of women and children. So they are willing to tolerate the often brutal enforcement of laws against it. Yet realistically, we are more likely to discourage the exploitation of women and children by regulating the labor practices followed by sex businesses. If businesses that provide customers with personal sexual services could operate legally, then they would be subject to the same labor regulations that apply to other businesses (given the nature of the work, additional regulations might be necessary).[3] Such businesses would not be allowed to treat workers like slaves, hire underage workers, deprive them of compensation for which they contracted, or expose them to unnecessary risks. The businesses could be required to enforce health and safety codes, provide workers with a minimum income and health insurance, and allow them to form collectives to negotiate for improved working conditions, compensation, and benefits.

Many feminists find it frightening to imagine a society where sex can be purchased as easily as soap, where selling sex is an occupational option like selling shoes, and where businesses that profit from commercial sex are as legitimate as Ben and Jerry's. Such imaginings usually lead to the question, "What next?" This is the slippery-slope argument, which is elaborated as fol-

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lows: "Are we now going to allow the sale of *x*?"—where *x* is your favorite tabooed object (babies, vital organs, bombs, and so on). The answer to this question is "No—not unless by tolerating the commercial distribution of *x* we can better protect the rights of particular people or better realize some moral ideal." By tolerating the commercial distribution of sexual services within certain limits, we can better protect the rights and interests of those who seek these services and, importantly, those who choose to earn income by providing them.

Though it is useful to ask what social forces lead some people to seek the relatively *impersonal* provision of *personal* sexual services, we should be equally critical of the cultural assumptions embedded in this question and in our various answers. At best, such excursions may help us understand how prostitution is shaped by large and small capital interests, as well as dominant gender, racial, and sexual ideologies, and thus how to devise regulatory instruments that discourage the recognizable forms of abuse, exploitation, and humiliation.

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The argument I am making is simply this: that the forms of exploitation and abuse suffered by prostitutes are similar to those suffered by other workers (though they are often more intense because of the illegal status of this work). Therefore these abuses should be addressed by mechanisms that improve the condition of workers generally. Sweatshop conditions should not be tolerated, violations of workers' constitutionally protected rights should not be tolerated, customers should not be permitted to engage in behaviors that endanger the workers' health or well being, care should be taken to avoid harm to noninvolved third parties, contracts for compensation and services should be voluntary and take into account the interests of all affected, and when these conditions are met such contracts should be respected (though not necessarily enforced by outside authorities). If the sex trade were regulated like other businesses, we would not have a perfect world—labor would still be underpaid and exploited and needs would still go unmet—but the world would be modestly improved.

The prostitute has often served as a symbol for the degraded status of the worker in capitalist societies, and prostitution itself has been evoked as a metaphor for the general relationship between workers and owners under capitalism. It is also used to represent other often exploitative social relationships, between husbands and wives, for example. But the metaphor works only if we assume that prostitution is universally exploitative and degrading, so that activities likened to it are cast as illegitimate. Rather than make the Marxist point that exchanges of sex or labor for money in a capitalist market are necessarily exploitative, the point of the metaphor is that the exchange of labor for money under capitalism is like the exchange of sex for money in *any* circumstances. But the assumption that all sex commerce is inherently exploitative fails to take into account the diversity of actual and possible practices. The degradation of the worker under capitalism is more like the degradation of someone who is forced to sell his/her labor—sexual or nonsexual—but it seems redundant to point this out. By insisting on the inherent and unqualified degradation of sex com-

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merce, those who use the metaphor only add to the degradation they presumably oppose.

Prostitutes—like gays, lesbians, and other sexual dissidents—are commonly viewed as threatening to families. But those who see them in this light often have a very narrow notion of what constitutes a family. In her book *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*, Luise White describes relationships between prostitutes and their customers that might be compared to informal polyandrous unions, where a variety of physical and social needs are met—needs that more conventional families also serve.[4] In the United States and elsewhere, many prostitutes have children, partners, and parents that they support through their work. Prostitutes and those with whom they are socially intimate and interdependent, and with whom they share households, are in fact families, and they deserve the same social supports as other families. Laws that criminalize prostitution tear families apart, separate parents and children, and render sex workers and their intimate partners criminals.

All this said, some may feel that there is still something immoral or objectionable about the prostitute's work, and that we would be better off suppressing the practice and finding other livelihoods for the people involved. At least three articles appearing in academic journals and books in recent years bear the title "What's Wrong With Prostitution?" Each attempts to locate just what it is that distinguishes prostitution from other human activities, although one concludes contrary to the others that nothing is deeply wrong with waged sex work.[5] Perhaps one way to approach the intuition that there *is* something inherently wrong is to compare commercial sex to other work that is very similar to it. For example, many prostitutes like to compare themselves to sex therapists, educators, and entertainers. Annie Sprinkle likens her work to both bodily and spiritual forms of guidance and help. Either we must show that there is something wrong with these activities or we must show that the analogy between prostitution and sex therapy/education/entertainment doesn't hold. Frankly, I can't see how to show either.

One fear that many feminists have about legalizing prostitution is that this would create just one more female job ghetto where women are coerced into stereotypical and subordinate roles, and low-paying, low-status, dead-end work. Furthermore, the industry's "products" would very likely reproduce status hierarchies among people based on age, race, class, gender, physical ability, and so on. Subordinate service roles would be filled—as they already are in the illegally run sex industry—by age, class, race, and gender subordinates, and their commercial sexual availability would perpetuate myths about the inferiority of persons from the subordinated groups. These are legitimate fears, and supporters of decriminalization have to consider how such outcomes might be avoided.

One of the first things to be said is that although the overwhelming majority of customers for prostitution are male, not all prostitutes are women. It's important to notice that some prostitutes serve customers of the same gender as themselves, the same economic class, and the same socially defined racial category. Though a great deal of contemporary prostitution involves heterosexual white, bourgeois males exploiting working-class or underclass women (especially women of color), keeping prostitution illegal will not affect this situation. Instead, by developing programs and policies that address poverty, racism, and sexism, and by regulating a legal sex industry, we can hope to make those who are socially oppressed less vulnerable to exploitation from those who aren't.

Anyone who advocates the legalization of prostitution needs to address the "But would you want your daughter . . . ?" argument. I suppose the only way to answer this question/objection is to take it personally—I happen to have a daughter who is now eight. This argument is meant to expose the hypocrisy of anyone who has made the assertions I've made. For, not surprisingly, my answer is "No, I wouldn't want my daughter to be a prostitute." So how can I accept this occupation for others? Well, first of all, this isn't all of my answer. The more nuanced answer is that, although I would prefer my daughter to be a mathematician, pianist, or labor organizer, were she to seek employment in the sex trade, I would still want the best for her. Her

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choice would be less heartbreaking to me if the work were legal, safe, reasonably well paid, and moderately respectable. In arguing for the decriminalization of prostitution, we need not go from the extreme of deploring it to the other extreme of romanticizing it. This objection works only if these are our only alternatives.

If prostitution remains criminalized, what can we expect? In Hollywood, some prostitutes will continue to profit from the instant celebrity status that being arrested at the right time and with the right customer can bring. But the average prostitute will continue to be abused by her (or his) clients and co-workers, exposed unnecessarily to disease, socially marginalized and demonized, harassed by public officials, and separated from her children and other family members; her children will suffer from neglect and poverty. And underage workers will continue to be used, with or without their or their family's consent. Perhaps, a large and coordinated effort to decriminalize prostitution for the sake of workers and their families is one more battle we need to wage with the radical religious right. □

Notes

1. One recent notable exception to this is Shannon Bell's *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).
2. *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism: Prostitution, Adultery, and Abortion* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
3. Roger Matthews proposes some general guidelines for regulating prostitution informed by radical rather than liberal principles in "Beyond Wolfenden?: Prostitution, Politics and the Law," in R. Matthews and J. Young, eds., *Confronting Crime* (London: Sage, 1986). See also my discussion of his proposals in *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism*, pp. 83-87 and 158-161.
4. Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
5. See Christine Overall, "What's Wrong With Prostitution?: Evaluating Sex Work" in *Signs* 17 (Summer 1992), pp. 705-724; Carole Pateman, "What's Wrong With Prostitution?" in *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 189-218; and Igor Primoratz, "What's Wrong With Prostitution?" in *Philosophy* 68 (1993), pp. 159-182.

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Michael Tomasky

WHY HEALTH CARE REFORM FAILED

Sometime in late 1992, there was a rally in Little Rock, Arkansas, where President-elect Bill Clinton was busily sorting through résumés and position papers. Although the rally drew about a thousand people, it was little noted in the major media; I learned of it in *Nation's Health*, a weekly newspaper devoted to health care issues. The rally was held to promote a single-payer health care plan, the system by which the federal government would direct health care—would become, in the argot, the "single payer" of reimbursements to health-care providers.

Under single-payer, health care would no longer be tied to employment and would thus be universal; the payment of insurance premiums, which finance health care now for all Americans except those on Medicare and Medicaid, would end, to be replaced by taxes. There being no insurance pools or health maintenance organizations under single-payer, people would be free to choose whatever primary care doctors they liked. Everyone would receive the same basic care, at little out-of-pocket cost, although those who had the money to do so could buy supplemental coverage. Finally, because there would be no need for health insurance as we know it, insurance companies would be out of the health care business. Canada and some Western European countries use a single-payer system, and though health care in those countries is obviously not perfect, far more Canadians, both recipients *and* doctors, profess satisfaction with their system than do their American counterparts; and, it costs far less. Insurance companies, of course, are less satisfied.

We don't know whether the Clintons paid any attention to that rally, but we do know from subsequent events that they did everything they could to run away from the single-payer proposal. In fact, candidate Bill Clinton already had run away from it, supporting on the stump either managed care or so-called play or pay schemes. So did the insurance and medical lobbies, the *New York Times*, and other influential newspapers, and most elected officials. On the right, Republican proposals consisted of variants of the above two schemes or were centered around the concept of medical "savings accounts," which would set an amount a family or individual could spend on health care each year, with any unused balance being refunded to them.

The eventual failure of the Clinton health plan set off one of those orgies of post-mortem punditry that Washington reserves for just a handful of topics each year. It was too complicated; it was a haphazard mish-mash of aspects of several competing plans; it was "socialized medicine" (the right, and hogwash); it truckled to the interests of the large insurance companies (the left, and, incidentally, the truth). Clinton should have attacked welfare reform first, many argued; without such a preemptive nod to the right, there was no realistic hope of winning with his nod to the left, which is what his plan was seen as; whether it really was is well open to question. Whatever the Clinton plan was, it was not a plan that

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directly and simply addressed most Americans' concerns about health care.

Looking back, *not* passing a health care bill in 1993—or even having one brought to a congressional vote—required monumental bungling. Health care is an admittedly immense and slothful beast to tame with one piece of legislation, but remember how the stage was set in 1991. In Pennsylvania, Democrat Harris Wofford won a special election for the U.S. Senate against Republican Richard Thornburgh, a former governor, the sitting U.S. attorney general, and an overwhelming favorite. Wofford won, after trailing by forty points in early polls, by identifying and stressing one issue: health care. He was intentionally foggy on the details, but explicit in calling for a universal health care system that would insure everyone. Thornburgh kept silent on the issue until late October, when he pilloried universal coverage as "untried, untested, radical, and costly." He promptly declined in the polls and finished with 45 percent of the vote.

After Wofford's victory, health care legislation seemed as inevitable as the rising of the sun. A few plans were advanced in 1991, but a clueless George Bush, the man who bought socks in Frederick, Maryland to prove he knew how regular people lived, didn't have any idea what to do. This swung the door wide open for Democrats, especially with an election, the season of grand promises, approaching fast. Health care, further, was one of those few issues on which the public seemed to trust Democrats more than Republicans. Finally, with Clinton's election, Democrats controlled the White House and both houses of Congress. How could health care reform, still at or near the top of voters' agenda, according to polls, not reach fruition? True to form, the Clintons found a way.

Was the left culpable in this retreat? Not really. On welfare, immigration, and on affirmative action, the left has been guilty of not having a strong program to present to the public; of critiquing conservative and liberal alternatives without offering any of its own. With respect to health care, this was not the case. The left had, and has, a position, and a good one: single-payer, although not without problems, would serve regular Americans' interests, both middle-class and poor people, in a variety of ways. Coverage not being contingent upon employment, everyone would have coverage from birth, and people could choose their own doctors. Furthermore, several studies, from the respected Congressional Budget Office and elsewhere, have shown how single-payer would save money by reducing overhead costs (if it sounds incongruous that government takeover of private activity could save money, then you don't know the insurance business). The single-payer bill, spearheaded in the House by Washington's Jim McDermott and in the Senate by Minnesota's Paul Wellstone, ultimately accrued ninety-three House co-sponsors—not a majority of Democrats, but a larger number than any of the other Democratic bills (save the president's) had. Most of all, single-payer had potential as an issue that working- and middle-class people of all colors and ethnicities could unite around, and this time not against the poor or the immigrant but against a real culprit, the large insurance companies, which, quite unlike the public, are relatively happy with U.S. health care just the way it is.

If the left did make a mistake in the way it pushed single-payer, it was placing too much emphasis on the "thirty-seven million uninsured Americans"—the phrase was repeated so often it began to lose its impact—and too little emphasis on the vast army of working- and middle-class underinsured people, who live in fear their coverage will be canceled or reduced. The thirty-seven million of course are important—by and large, they're some of the poorest people in America, most of them working. But a strategy that emphasized uninsured and underinsured alike could have spoken to a larger audience and could potentially have paired poor and middle-class interests with each other, instead of isolating the poor as the only class whose interests the left really had in its heart.

But single-payer never really got to first base. The Clintons pooh-poohed it, other moderate Democrats followed suit, and the press sloughed it off as too radical for America. How and why did these things happen? And, after single-payer was out of the picture, why was there no health care reform at all? For all the left's reservations about Clinton, health care reform was one area

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in which many held out some hope.

Progressive aspirations for a national health plan date back to at least 1912, when Theodore Roosevelt, running under the Bull Moose banner, incorporated it into his presidential platform. TR's cousin, as one might expect, also supported a national health plan; it was to be a part of the New Deal as originally conceived, but the American Medical Association (AMA), even then, made known to Franklin its rather strong feelings on the subject, and FDR backed off. In 1948, Harry Truman proposed a national health bill, but similar forces prevented its passage. John F. Kennedy concentrated not on national health care but coverage for the elderly ("Try to stay young!" went the lampooning slogan of Kennedy impersonator Vaughn Meader). Kennedy, too, gave in before the power of the AMA, which raised the usual warnings about "bolshevism" and "socialized medicine." It took the momentum of the Johnson administration and the 89th Congress to pass Medicare, providing government-financed coverage for the elderly, and Medicaid, the similar program that serves the very poor. Needless to say, the predicted bolshevism did not arise; just the opposite, in fact, since the programs converted the elderly and the poor from (in many instances) charity cases to paying customers, with the government shelling out the fees. A *New Yorker* cartoon from 1969 shows a physician buying a yacht, in cash, exclaiming, "And to think I opposed the passage of Medicare."

In the mid-1970s, Oregon Representative Al Ullman, who chaired the House Ways and Means Committee, grew so bold as to predict that Congress would pass, and President Gerald Ford would sign, national health legislation that stipulated universal coverage for all Americans through a mix of employer mandates—that is, making employers provide health insurance for workers—and an expanded federal role for the unemployed and others. It didn't happen, of course, for the same old reason—the power of the lobbies, particularly the AMA and the vari-

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ous insurance lobbies. The Reagan and Bush years were predictably bleak. During all this time, of course, public opinion polls showed immense popular support for national health care in one form or another; it's just that the public is no match for the opposition.

As reform efforts failed and as health care costs shot through the roof, some Americans, progressives to be sure but others also, looked to a country from which America typically does not receive inspiration. The Canadian single-payer system, consolidated into one national plan in 1971, had appeal for several reasons. In addition to the attributes noted above, the single-payer system in Canada kept health care costs under somewhat better control: Canada typically spends about 11 percent of its GNP on health care, the United States, almost 15 percent. In his 1984 presidential run, Jesse Jackson committed his campaign to a Canadian-style system. In 1988, Jackson was able to force the platform committee at the Democratic national convention to add a plank supporting national health care, though not necessarily a government-driven plan. A platform is just a platform, but at least it bespeaks some degree of recognition.

Jackson deserves credit for putting a single-payer alternative forward, but it took others to make the establishment pay more attention. In 1990, Chrysler head Lee Iacocca noted that health care costs accounted for $700 of the price of every car made in America, while the figure for Canada was just $223 in U.S. currency. He expressed admiration for the Canadian system and suggested that perhaps we ought to take a look at it. Tellingly, his remarks were reported far more prominently in the Canadian papers than in American publications. Joseph Califano, Jr., a former secretary of Health and Human Services, also looked to Canada and liked much of what he saw.

One might have thought that Iacocca and Califano would have wielded some influence on the public discussion. Certainly the AMA feared as much; in 1989, the AMA, sniffing the dangerously shifting winds, planned to spend $2.5 million on a so-called "Public Alert Program," designed to tell Americans "the facts" about Canada's system. As researchers Theodore Marmor and Jerry L. Mashaw write, "the doctors' association placed advertisements in major media and supplied press kits for a blitz of editorials, opinion pieces, and reports about Canada. Similar essays began appearing in national and local papers by people identified as, for example, 'a surgeon from White Plains.'" A mini-scandal over financing forced the cancellation of the campaign, but not before millions of Americans "heard that Canadian health care doesn't work well and that, even if it did, it couldn't work in the United States."

The AMA campaign was not the end of it. In 1990, a year before Wofford's victory, the campaign for U.S. Senate in Maine showed again how any talk of a Canadian model could scare the powers that be—and how susceptible such talk was, and is, to countervailing scare tactics. A Democrat named Neil Rolde made Canadian-style health care a centerpiece of his campaign—the first election to turn on health care as a major issue. Republican incumbent William Cohen and campaign consultant Bill McInturff knew just what to do. Their ad program featured scenes of long lines at a Department of Motor Vehicles office. Said the voiceover: "This is your health care system if we go to a national plan." McInturff later bragged that "we trashed the hell out of the Canadian system," and Cohen, even though slightly outspent by the wealthy Rolde, carried the day in a landslide.

Wofford's victory gave single-payer advocates a new opening. Wofford himself did not endorse a single-payer plan, talking instead in generalities. Still, the fact that Thornburgh was unable to do to Wofford what Bill Cohen had done to his opponent seemed to suggest that something had changed.

The support for single-payer was in some respects broad, but it was always on the margins of so-called respectable opinion. The single-payer drive was spearheaded by several major unions, Ralph Nader's Public Citizen group, and more than a hundred and fifty grassroots organizations. Certain other groups like Physicians for a National Health Program and the National Council of Senior Citizens supported single-payer, but their numbers were small—the physicians' group numbers about 5,500 members, while the AMA has a membership approaching 300,000. Among politicians, Jerry Brown was

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the only presidential candidate in 1992 to support single-payer, while other Democrats, including Clinton and most notably Paul Tsongas, dismissed it. On Capitol Hill, the leaders were McDermott, a former psychiatrist who was never among the most influential members of Congress, and Wellstone, who, let us say, does not have a terribly high reputation in Washington circles. These were, unfortunately, easy marks for the mainstream press to ignore or deride, so when a campaigning George Bush made the ridiculous assertion that Canada's health care system combined "the efficiency of the post office with the sensitivity of the KGB" and labeled it "a cure worse than the disease," he got away with it.

Canadians themselves were puzzled. The *New York Times*, which in its editorials had consistently knocked single-payer and backed managed competition, did work up the fortitude to run one piece in which Canadian providers and officials were permitted to speak up in defense of their system. Practically all of Bush's notions—exaggerated accounts of rationed service, waiting lists, and high administrative costs—were exposed for what they were. Dennis Timbrell, president of the Ontario Hospital Association, struck at the heart of the matter in pointing out that Canadian health care costs less—at the time, $1,961 a person in Canada to $2,566 a person in the United States—because of the "overwhelming duplication of bureaucracies working in dozens of insurance companies in the United States, no two of which have the same forms or even the same coverage." Of course, American political discourse assumes that bloat and inefficiency are features solely of the public sector. Anyone who's ever had to call their plan's offices to straighten something out knows better, but such are the pinched parameters of public conversation.

This was the milieu in which the Clinton adminstration set about its work: support existed for a single-payer plan, but it paled next to the power of its opponents—the major lobbies, the *New York Times*, most mainstream politicians, the president-elect himself. Among the public there existed broad support for universal coverage; but whether that translated into support for a single-payer type plan is open to question. There are many polls on this, but their findings are inconsistent, depending on how the question was asked, whether respondents were asked about just one plan or several, and so on. Several polls did show that the *features* of a single-payer system—universal coverage, freedom to choose physicians, contained costs—had broad support. But the label single-payer had already taken such a whacking in the major media that people often had a bad impression of it, perhaps without knowing that it advanced the very principles they favored.

It was pretty easy, in other words, for the Clintons to ignore single-payer advocates. In February 1993, Quentin Young, a past president of Physicians for a National Health Plan and a past health adviser to Jesse Jackson, was summoned to the White House. It didn't take long for him to realize that he'd been invited for, in his words, a "pseudo-consultation." White House aide Walter Zelman made it clear that the administration considered single-payer to be "not politically feasible."

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Around the same time, David Himmelstein of the Harvard Medical School met with Hillary Rodham Clinton. Mrs. Clinton asked Himmelstein how the White House could beat the insurance industry. "With presidential leadership and polls showing that 70 percent of Americans favor the features of a single-payer system," he replied. Her response: "Tell me something new, David."

Were Hillary and Zelman right? Any honest analysis has to admit that they probably were, or at least that their position was entirely rational from their perspective. What two Roosevelts and a Truman couldn't do, two Clintons weren't likely to accomplish. The White House was pinning a lot on successful health care reform; even with all of Clinton's evasions and double-talk, if he'd succeeded in getting health care passed, *any* health care, he'd have ensured himself lots of re-election support from the middle and the left. The political decision to craft a careful and not-too-radical plan was an understandable one. Once the word came down from the Clintons, other leading Democrats followed suit. Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, speaking informally with influential journalists in July, said bluntly that single-payer "will not be enacted."

But the AMA and insurance lobbies fought the Clinton proposal with the same intensity they'd have brought to a single-payer fight. A political calculation to trim sails is defensible if, without sacrificing too much in the way of principle, it gets you more votes. The Clinton calculation did not do that. Given the number of co-sponsors single-payer had in the House of Representatives and the appeal of the plan's salient features, a single-payer system could, conceivably, have been sold to the public. The seller, though, had to be willing to confront one of Washington's most powerful lobbies—something the Clintons weren't up to; but this, too, is something people clearly say they want their leaders to do more of.

When Clinton finally announced his own plan in September of 1993, his report outlined six principles: security, simplicity, savings, quality, choice, and responsibility. Those are precisely the principles single-payer supports, with the exception that it is vulnerable to some attack on the question of quality, although those attacks, like all criticisms of single-payer, were grossly distorted. (The argument, in brief, is that advanced technology and specialty care in Canada lag behind that of the United States, and there does seem to be some truth to the claim.)

In the face of all this, single-payer advocates pressed forward, hoping to get the administration to incorporate as many aspects of their bill as possible—notably, they wanted a guarantee that coverage would be universal, and the opportunity for states to adopt their own single-payer plans if they so chose. A *Times* article in May 1993, although largely patronizing in tone with its descriptions of single-payer advocates as "guerilla fighters" who were seen by some as "hopeless idealists," nevertheless did allow that the single-payer coalition in the House was one the president couldn't afford to anger too much if he wanted to have votes for his own plan. The

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New England Journal of Medicine, interestingly enough, gave single-payer a boost through the spring and summer of 1993. It editorialized favorably about the plan in April, and in August published the results of a study, done by Himmelstein and his Harvard colleague Dr. Steffie Woolhandler, showing that paperwork accounted for fully 25 percent of American health care costs, more than double the percentage in Canada. The study held that the United States could save $50 billion in hospital costs by adopting a Canadian-style system.

That study, too, fell into the abyss. Finally, six weeks later, Clinton unveiled his managed care proposal. In one of the rare jousts a single-payer supporter was admitted to make on the *Times*'s op-ed page—indeed, the overwhelming majority of pro-single-payer agitprop in the *Times* was relegated to the letters columns—Melvin Konner, a doctor who teaches at Emory University, skewered the plan and showed again the advantages of a single-payer system. Clinton's proposal, contrary to the rhetoric, would limit choice of physician because "managed care isn't profitable without administrative efficiency: the plan mustn't deal with too many doctors. And that in turn means little or no choice." A little further down, Konner hit the bullseye:

> In the Prudential Insurance Company's 1993 newsletter, Bill Link, an executive vice president, said, "For [Prudential] the best case scenario for reform—even better than the status quo—would be enactment of a mananged competition proposal."
>
> The Clintons are creating an insurance business oligopoly that will own a seventh of the economy. Insurers are moving aggressively into the delivery of care. Prudential, Metropolitan Life, Cigna and Aetna have each acquired H.M.O.'s and other managed-care companies that enroll millions of people.
>
> This trend is likely to result in a vertical monopoly on America's health care, in which a few powerful insurers would control the delivery of care from the top down.

Konner wrote what everyone to Clinton's left knew to be the case; still, as soon as Clinton announced his proposal, the left opposition began to splinter into the expected we-should-work-with-him and we-should-keep-pushing camps. The only alternatives at this point were to try to bring the McDermott bill to the floor for a vote, knowing that it wouldn't pass with a Democratic president against it, or to support Clinton publicly while privately trying to amend his proposal. Labor unions, by and large, fell into the accommodationist camp. This was at precisely the same time that Clinton was pushing NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). Labor opposed NAFTA vehemently, and apparently had decided to give the president's health plan qualified support so as not to appear too obstructionist.

The unions were following an understandable impulse to try to stay in the game—only by publicly saying kind things about the Clinton proposal could they hope to influence it. Ralph Nader's Public Citizen, the grassroots group Neighbor to Neighbor, and a few unions like the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers took the harder line, while Citizen Action and the Consumers' Union sought compromise.

A few developments served at least to keep single-payer in the conversation. In December 1993 the Congressional Budget Office released a report demonstrating that a single-payer program could save taxpayers $114 billion a year. In January 1994, McDermott and Wellstone announced their financing package, which included an 8.4 percent payroll tax on employers with more than seventy-five workers, a 4 percent tax on employers with fewer than seventy-five workers, and a 2.1 percent tax on workers' taxable income. Of course, this immediately opened the plan up to attack from conservatives and even from many Democrats who'd caught the anti-tax contagion. In reality, the levels were arguably less than many people already paid for their insurance premiums—Wellstone said most large businesses would actually see a saving from the roughly 12 percent of payroll they paid in premiums. In February, representatives of the 60,000-member American College of Surgeons, testifying before Congress, announced "qualified approval" of single-payer. The same month, Jack Smith of General Motors told the *Washington Post* that he backed a single-payer system. In March, *Business Week* suggested it may be time to give single-payer another look.

What was going on with the Clinton plan, in

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the meantime? The well-known and effective "Harry & Louise" ads, featuring the yuppie-ish couple who expressed various fears about the Clinton proposal, had already been on the air for several weeks. Bill and Hillary countered with some parody ads of their own, although they didn't really run as an ad campaign—they were seen only by journalists and other D.C. insiders at a dinner. The unions hauled out Stiller and Meara to do an ad. Stiller and Meara? Nothing against them, but couldn't the unions have enlisted someone a little more up-to-date?

The "Harry & Louise" ads were paid for by the Health Industry Association of America. The HIAA represents small and medium-sized insurance companies, which did indeed stand to lose business as a result of the Clinton plan, as well as the largest five companies—Aetna, Prudential, Cigna, Metropolitan Life, and the Travelers. As the Prudential executive quoted above by Melvin Konner makes clear, Prudential had little difficulty with the Clinton proposal; all the big five companies, save the Travelers, had always pushed for managed care and had helped finance the research of the Jackson Hole Group, an organization of policy experts that conceived a managed competition plan on which the Clinton proposal was in good part based. The Clintons strove, in light of the famous ads, to portray themselves as embattled slayers of the insurance dragon, but it just didn't sell. Of course, the Republicans were tenacious in their attacks on the Clinton plan, which was also roughed up a bit in the press, particularly by an oddly influential article in the *New Republic*, which seemed to win people over by simple virtue of the fact that its author had evidently read the 1,364 page document.

By the summer of 1994, the House Ways and Means Committee passed a bill that was basically the Clinton plan, with some aspects of the more conservative bill offered by Tennessee Congressman Jim Cooper. For single-payer advocates, it did include an option for states to try their own single-payer plans, but that victory was undermined by a provision allowing large employers (five thousand employees or more) in those states to opt out. The Senate passed a much more incremental bill, which sought to cover 95 percent of Americans by the year 2002 and set up a commission to make recommendations if—when—that goal were to go unmet. It is true that the House Education and Labor Committee voted out the McDermott bill, but barely: By a vote of 22-21, the committee voted to send it to the floor without recommendation, a stipulation a committee makes when it wants others to know it finds a piece of legislation distasteful or difficult in some way. The vote was permitted by the chairman, William Ford, only on the condition that the fifteen single-payer supporters on the committee vote for the compromise version of Clinton's bill.

Neither bill ever made it to a floor vote. For the single-payers, it was a defeat that had to have been expected, while for Clinton, it was one of the low points of his presidency.

Could the Clintons have passed a single-payer plan? It's doubtful. It did require a tax increase, and a big one. Of course, those tax payments would have replaced insurance premium payments, and that could have been explained, although needless to say opponents would have had a field day with television commercials on that one. On the plus side, all the advantages raised previously—simplicity, universal coverage not tied to employment, and so on—would have had wide appeal and would have been much easier for people to grasp than the Clinton plan. It must be noted that a single-payer ballot initiative in California in 1994 lost badly—59 percent to 41 percent. But a group of underfinanced public interest lobbies trying to do something is one thing, a piece of federal legislation with the full support of a president quite another.

There are two supposedly axiomatic political truths that a vigorous single-payer debate would have brought to head-on collision. First, that people hate big government. Second, that people hate big lobbies and vested interests. Single-payer would involve the government more fully in health care coverage and policy, but it would strike terror into two of the most powerful lobbies in Washington, the doctors' and large insurers' lobbies. So the political gamble would have come down to: will people roll the dice on a government program provided it whacks the stuffing out of powerful lobbying

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groups?

It's hard to say. But consider that people always tell pollsters they'd be willing to pay more taxes if they were sure those taxes went to a specific good in which they could be certain of sharing. Consider also that this particular good, health care, is one that people have repeatedly said they want in better and more certain supply than they have now. Furthermore, single-payer could be combined with other offerings—like a general tax cut for middle- and low-income people, for example, or some form of relief for small businesses—that would make the tax aspect less onerous. Given all these factors, people might defy the experts and say yes to just this one government program. Opponents might have fun dreaming up their ad campaigns about new taxes, but imagine the single-payer ads, with fretting, stogie-chomping insurance executives worrying about having to sell the yacht. And if the people didn't go for it, at least we'd know precisely where we stand. As it is, with the Clintons' bill, we know no more of what people want and don't want in health care reform than we knew before.

As I said above, the left put too much emphasis on the uninsured and not enough on the many people, especially working parents, who have insurance but are terrified that they'll lose it next week. This is a political criticism rather than a moral one; no one's saying the uninsured don't matter, simply that, as a political calculus, arguments should address those worried about losing their coverage. The inability—or unwillingness—to do so reflects one of the left's largest problems: it has no middle-class constituency anymore. Until it finds a way to reconnect with one, it is sure to lose every one of these big fights.

A New York congressman once told me a story that has some bearing on all this. About fifteen years ago, he said, progressive New Yorkers were gathered to make a determination about how to use federal funds given under a particular housing program. Practically everyone there wanted all the money to go for low-income housing. This congressman suggested that 15 percent of the money be set aside for middle-income subsidies, reasoning that if middle-income people were given a small stake in the program, the constituency for it would be more politically powerful. He was, naturally, upbraided, cursed, called a "moderate," all those awful things. But he was right as rain. Politicians are terrified of

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middle-class wrath, and they're far less likely to cut programs that serve the middle class—and if they do, they lose votes. While Republican politicians are destroying programs for the poor, they're moving much more cautiously on programs that affect the middle class. With respect to the housing program in New York, the congressman—who lost his argument—told me that he was certain then that the program would eventually face the knife, as indeed it now does. The lesson is not to abandon the poor, obviously, but to bring poor people's and middle-class people's interests together.

Back to single-payer: to sell the program in the future, there ought to be a little less talk of Canada, which, Neil Young notwithstanding, does not impress many Americans as a place from which we need to import things. Single-payer should also be adapted to make it less vulnerable to the standard criticisms: specialty care and technological innovation, which America does seem to do better than Canada, are real concerns. Finally, people who can afford it and want to have it must be able to buy supplemental insurance. Some single-payer advocates oppose this, but it seems obvious that you'll never sell a $110,000-a-year family of four in this country on a plan that tells them they get the same treatment as a $35,000-a-year family of four and have no choice in the matter. This does not mean that you're creating class divisions. Just the opposite: if the $110,000 household and the $35,000 household support you, you've created cross-class solidarity, putting these middle-class and poor (or nearly poor) households together.

Single-payer has potential, then, not just as a health care fixative, but as a program that can bring middle-class and poor, black and white, into political coalition. And this is how the left should frame the question if it comes up again—not as the single pure and just alternative to a raft of compromised alternatives that will wipe out an idealized poor. Developing this kind of majoritarian approach on a whole range of issues, making a point of trying to speak to and represent people we don't now consider to be "our" constituencies is the only way the left can revivify itself. To continue to follow outdated New Left paradigms of protest and empowerment politics, using political tactics that engage activist representatives of various outgroups and not much of anybody else (who are in their turn inevitably written off as reactionary or racist or whatever), is a certain disaster. We can't afford to waste much more time learning this lesson. □

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Richard Rothstein

THE REAL COSTS OF EDUCATION

What the Numbers Tell Us

Many on the left are befuddled by the American public's staunch resistance to taxes—a seemingly irrational hostility that often paralyzes public policy. Americans are convinced that they are overtaxed, although their tax burden is lower than those of other major industrialized nations. Health care reform was stymied in part because of unreasoning opposition to expansion of any government program—there's a (perhaps apocryphal) story of the senior citizen who protested to President Clinton about his plan for a "government takeover of Medicare." Even Clinton's plan to "end welfare as we know it" has floundered because of the political impossibility of raising new taxes for child care, training, and public service jobs.

Americans' feelings about taxes are fed by our culture's deeply-rooted individualism and anti-collectivist impulses, but they are not entirely irrational. They are based on real economic phenomena that are easily misunderstood. We do pay higher taxes and receive public services whose quality does not improve commensurate with our higher payments. In the last quarter century, government spending has jumped from 26 percent to 31 percent of our gross national product, while schools are not noticeably better, police protection has apparently declined, mail is delivered less often, streets are dirtier, and roads have deteriorated. Yet few Americans realize that over the long run we *must* pay a greater share of our incomes in taxes simply to maintain a constant level of government services. If, as in recent years, taxes increase too slowly, public services must deteriorate.

This apparent paradox has roots in the "Baumol effect," after Princeton (and NYU) economist William Baumol, who has spent much of his career explaining the "cost disease" that afflicts many government services. The cause of this "cost disease" is that it is more difficult to improve productivity in some activities than in others. In manufacturing, where it is easier to substitute capital for labor, productivity gains come relatively smoothly. In more labor-intensive fields, the picture is very different. Baumol has noted that it now takes as long to play a Scarlatti harpsichord solo as it took two hundred and sixty years ago. In those days, artisans manufactured one watch in the time it took to play a hundred solos. But today, a watch can be manufactured with less labor time than is consumed by a single performance. "This means that in these 260 years the price of concert tickets must have risen about a hundred times as fast as the price of a watch, if both their costs were to be covered." Watches are no longer luxuries, while concert tickets are very expensive. But we don't blame this on the music industry's "bureaucratic bloat."

Most government employees do work that is more like harpsichord playing than like watchmaking. Technology constantly improves factory workers' productivity. But similar improvements are impossible for many government-provided services. To generate productivity increases for teachers like those of autoworkers, we would have to increase class sizes from, say, twenty-five in 1979 to thirty-three—so that "output per worker" could grow as fast as it did in the auto industry. Police officers would have to prevent nearly three crimes for every two they stopped in 1979. Judges who presided over ten trials a month in 1979 would have to hold thirteen to-

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day, caseloads of probation officers would have to increase, and nurses in our public hospitals would have to care for 32 percent more patients. If any of this were to happen (and some has), we'd notice a decline in public service quality. Work reorganization may offset some of these pressures—lower paid teacher aides or nursing aides, for example, now perform some of the less skilled tasks once performed by professionals. But work reorganization in public services can solve only a small part of the problem. When we purchase many manufactured products, on the other hand, productivity growth from both automation and work reorganization has been so rapid that we can experience quality improvements while fewer workers are employed and prices simultaneously decline.

Not all government, of course, is immune to productivity improvements. Anyone who's recently had his or her temperature taken in a hospital can recognize that technology has reduced the time required for some nursing services. School classrooms equipped with computers may permit teachers to use their time more efficiently. Computers permit clerical workers in the Social Security Administration to issue checks more quickly. Most cities have adopted automated trash collection vehicles with a single driver, replacing trucks with several workers who manually empty garbage cans. Here, productivity gains may be comparable to those for auto, computer, or VCR manufacturing. If most government were like sanitation departments, taxes could decline.

We expect government to perform many tasks for which productivity improvements are unattainable, so our taxes should increase to maintain the quality of public service, if public servants' salaries are to keep up with those of private-sector workers. Because taxes as a share of our incomes have jumped relatively little in the last twenty-five years, these services have deteriorated. Although Americans enjoy complaining about taxes, the truth is that we can afford to pay a growing share of our incomes to government because we save so much of our incomes by paying less for automobiles, computers, VCRs, and groceries.

Baumol's insights help us to understand the public's anger with the presumed failures of our public education system. When Benno Schmidt resigned Yale's presidency to head Christopher Whittle's "Edison Project," a private school network, he explained in the *Wall Street Journal* why he'd given up on public schools. "We have roughly doubled per-pupil spending (after inflation) in public schools since 1965," Schmidt said, but the "nation's investment in educational improvement has produced very little return." This, it turns out, is a serious distortion. To understand why, we must consider one further aspect of the problem: how differences in industry productivity affect our understanding of inflation.

In 1967, American schools spent an average of only $687 per pupil. By 1991, this had climbed to $5,566, a growth of 710 percent. Was Benno Schmidt being overly conservative in 1992 when he said spending had only doubled? Of course not. Schmidt relied on a commonplace "adjustment" of the 1967 spending figure for inflation, translating the 1967 "nominal" dollar figure to "1991 dollars," or "real" dollars. But this adjustment, though conventional, implies assumptions of which few educators or other policy experts, despite seeming familiarity with "inflation," are aware.

Over any period, school expenditures may rise solely because of inflation, or because more resources—like teachers, textbooks, aides, and so forth—are purchased, or from a combination of both factors. For example, if a school district is faced with a 10 percent rise in the price of textbooks, it must increase textbook spending by 10 percent to provide students with the same number of textbooks. If college graduates in other fields get higher starting salaries, schools will have to increase salaries too, just to attract the same quality of teacher. The resulting pressure on school budgets is what we call inflation—paying more for the same resources.

If, on the other hand, a district decides to supply students with more (or better) textbooks, or to reduce class sizes by hiring more teachers, or to recruit higher quality teachers by paying salaries above the going "market" rate, the cost of these decisions represents a "real" increase in school spending. If we want to know whether "real" per pupil spending has doubled, we have to examine whether schools now utilize twice

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the resources they utilized a quarter-century ago. We must calculate what it would have cost, in 1991, to purchase exactly those inputs (teachers, textbooks, administrators, and so on) schools purchased in 1967.

To adjust expenditures for inflation, it is commonplace to use the "consumer price index for all urban consumers," a formula produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and referred to as the "CPI-U." Using this consumer price index, $687 in "1967 dollars" becomes $2,794 in "1991 dollars." In "real" terms, therefore, per pupil expenditures went from $2,794 to $5,566. As Benno Schmidt claimed, we "roughly doubled" real school spending.

It is probable, however, that use of the CPI-U causes an overstatement of school spending growth. The Bureau of Labor Statistics calculates the CPI-U by tracking the price increases of all goods and services that "typical" urban consumers buy. They call this collection of goods and services a "market basket." Yet schools are not "typical urban consumers," so the market basket we use to calculate elementary and secondary education inflation should be different from the market basket we use to calculate consumer inflation. Schools, for example, rarely rent apartments, and urban consumers rarely hire teachers. Because inflation rates vary widely among particular items, we have to select carefully the appropriate inflation index to use for schools.

Because of the productivity growth differences between industries discussed above, the price of education services is likely to rise faster than the price of an urban consumer's average purchases: "inflation" in services like education typically exceeds inflation in manufactured goods because productivity (output per employee-hour worked) is likely to grow more slowly in many services. Productivity growth in manufacturing has allowed industrial firms to reduce their costs (or at least slow the growth in costs) and therefore increase the prices of manufactured products more slowly or not at all. In contrast, many service-sector firms and institutions cannot easily substitute machinery for labor as manufacturers do; these service organizations (including a disproportionate share of government activities) have had to increase prices faster than average to remain competitive in the national labor market. Disparities in inflation mirror differences in productivity growth, and industries (like schools) in which it's hard to achieve productivity growth will have higher-than-average inflation. Real spending per pupil will rise even though more resources per pupil are not being provided. For this reason, the CPI-U systematically understates the inflation facing school districts.

Because of these considerations, Lawrence Mishel, research director of the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), developed an index (the net services index or NSI) to measure inflation in service industries like education. It estimates the "market basket" of goods and services purchased by service industries, a large proportion of which experience relatively slow productivity growth. In a study done for EPI, when we adjusted schools' average per pupil spending by the NSI, we found that "real" spending in 1967 was $3,456, not the $2,794 generated by a CPI-U adjustment. Real school spending growth is the amount of new money spent in excess of inflationary changes measured by the NSI—or 61 percent real growth, after inflation. This is considerably less than the conventional view that "real" (that is, CPI-U adjusted) school spending doubled in this period.

It may be the case that even the NSI understates inflation in school costs, because of the unusual role that women play in education employment. A quarter-century ago, schools had their pick of the most qualified women college graduates, who generally had few other professional opportunities open to them. Since 1967, women's opportunities in other fields have expanded. This means that elementary and secondary schools, in order to attract the same quality of teacher, would have had to increase teacher salaries even faster than salaries of other professionals increased. (In reality, school districts tended not to increase teacher salary scales faster than the general rise in professional salaries, so schools may have had to settle for a lower average quality of teacher, despite apparent salary increases.) Thus, "real" cost increases, as measured by the NSI, may still understate the cost increases faced by schools, and the increase in

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"real" per-pupil spending may in fact be less than 61 percent.

Perhaps we can't expect most voters to appreciate the subtleties of productivity growth and inflation. But it is not too much to ask that journalists and politicians (who should know better) restrain their demagogic attacks on a public sector whose costs, inevitably, will continue to rise.

Although real increases in per-pupil spending have been smaller than conventionally believed, they have still been considerable. The Baumol effect explains, at best, half the public's concern with the rising cost of public education. In my recent study of public education expenditures, I examined these adjusted real increases as well, and found that misconceptions of a different kind characterize the public's understanding of these increases. For example, more of the real per-pupil spending increase probably went to special education than to regular education; other big chunks went to an expanded school lunch program to offset growing child poverty, and to special programs for non-English speakers, "at-risk" students, and pregnant or parenting teens. While there may be good reasons for this increased investment in special education and other programs for special populations of students, the public can't expect SAT scores of regular students to rise as a result. Public education has a varied set of expected outcomes. If we want to understand whether investment in education has paid off, we have to match the investments with the specific programs in which they were made, rather than evaluating the efficacy of all school spending with the outcomes of only the regular academic program.

It seems that over the 1967-1991 period, regular education spending's real growth, adjusted by the NSI, was only about 28 percent. Some part of this growth is attributable to the fact that the teaching force is older now than it was in 1967, and teachers' pay in most districts increases automatically with years of service. To some extent, schools purchase greater skill and experience with these pay increases, but to a large extent the provision of career paths with escalating salary schedules is necessary simply to attract college graduates to the profession.

What remains, therefore, is relatively modest growth in real regular education spending. As it turns out, there have been relatively modest improvements in regular education outcomes over this period—lower dropout rates and higher test scores, especially for minority students. Were these improvements sufficient to justify the modestly higher investments? It's a much closer question than commonplace complaints allow. □

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Chiara R. Nappi

A TALE OF TWO SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Funding in the United States and Italy

In December 1993 a law known as *Finanziaria 1993* was approved by the Italian legislature. A minor article of this law, article 4, introduced a revolution in the Italian educational system, since it required that each single school should be allowed "financial, organizational and educational autonomy." Maybe the introduction of such an article in a "financial" law was predicated on economic considerations, such as the presumed economic benefits of reducing the centralized bureaucracy of the Italian school system. Whatever the rationale, the brief statement of article 4 challenged the traditional hierarchical and centralist assumptions of the Italian system in favor of an approach based on local autonomy. It ended the long history of an educational vision inherited from Napoleon and strengthened during the *Risorgimento*, which ensured the triumph of centralized and statist views. Probably it was not an accident that this law was proposed in 1993 during the height of north Italian separatism, exemplified by the emergence of new political parties (such as the Northern League) that aspire to regional autonomy.

Nevertheless, article 4 took the country by surprise. Since then, educational experts have tried to justify its introduction as a response to the quest for educational autonomy and freedom of experimentation begun by teachers in the seventies, or as a reaction to more recent demands for reform advanced by students, or simply as an answer to the generic perception that the Italian school system is in need of some kind of modernization.

However, the consequences of this law might be far more revolutionary than any intervention suggested by these hopes for change. At the time it was approved, its implications were not clear to anybody, not even to the legislators. According to the usual procedure, the Ministry of Education had nine months, up to September 1994, to come up with the *decreti attuativi*, the equivalent of what in this country would be called the administrative code, to flesh out the content and meaning of the law and the details of its implementation. Without the approval of an administrative code within that date, the law would automatically expire.

The law did indeed expire in September 1994, and as of today, more than a year and a half after its introduction, the question of what local autonomy should mean is still hotly debated in the country. Although article 4 is dead, the idea of autonomy is not. Autonomy has somehow become a synonym for change, and therefore it appeals to many, although everyone seems to have a different idea of what its implementation should look like. On the other side, an increasing majority of people are afraid that autonomy might lead to the destruction of a school system that, with all its limitations and failures, still seems to work better than most—for instance, better than the U.S. system, whose trademark is local autonomy. In the meantime, those European countries that have statist arrangements similar to the Italian one (France, Greece, Spain, and so on) are closely watching the Italian debate.

Background

As in many other countries, in Italy the central government establishes a course of study and a

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detailed set of outcomes at each grade level,provides school funding, and negotiates teachers' salaries and benefits at the national level. All teachers are state employees and must pass the same state exam in their field of expertise before getting tenure in any school in the country. They get the same salary wherever they teach. Personnel recruitment is done at the regional level, and teachers are assigned to whatever school has an opening when their turn in the waiting list comes up. The students can enroll in the school of their choice, even if this school is located in a town different from the one they live and pay property taxes in. At the end of each school cycle they all take the same state exam. This guarantees a certain educational equity across the country. Moreover, thanks to state financial support, local schools need not be preoccupied by financial matters as are their U.S. counterparts. The unquestioned philosophy in Italy so far has been that education is a national responsibility and the state must control it and pay for it. In particular, a common curriculum is thought necessary to ensure a common national culture as well as a measure of educational equity for all students, regardless of the specific school they attend.

There is no doubt that the basic inspiration of article 4 was the U.S. educational system. Indeed, the first interpretation of autonomy in the Italian press and public opinion was the idea of a principal or "manager" in each school who would have the authority to hire, tenure, and fire teachers, negotiate salaries, decide the curriculum, raise money and so on, under the direction of some not-well-identified citizen/parent policy-making body—a recognizable rendering of the U.S. system. The surprising thing was that those who proposed this "wild" version of autonomy did not seem to realize that in order to run schools the American way, with most of the decision making and administrative tasks performed at the local level, one "manager" alone would not do; it would be necessary to have in place a complete administrative structure, with expensive duplication in each school district, which would make the Italian system much more expensive than it is now. In fact, the United States is currently coping with the high cost of such an educational structure. In New Jersey, for example, there are six hundred independent school districts, an arrangement that is widely agreed to be the cause of the high educational costs in the state, the highest in the country. Indeed, the New Jersey Department of Education is now trying to promote regionalization and consolidation of districts with the declared purpose of merging services, reducing administration, and controlling costs.

The U.S. system has very different historical origins from the European one. When in the 1700s the colonists were settling in the American territories, they founded their own schools, often of a specific religious denomination. The schools were administered by the citizens themselves, who were responsible for raising funds, writing the curriculum, choosing books, hiring teachers, building and maintaining facilities. With time, when the rural communities evolved into towns, professional administrators were hired to run the schools, but the citizens' committees, now turned into school boards, continued to be responsible for the budget, personnel hiring and contract negotiations, the curriculum, and so on. Over two centuries the basic structure of American education, based on local financing of education and therefore local autonomy, has not changed in any substantial manner. Since the Founding Fathers said nothing about education in the U.S. Constitution, the responsibility of providing schooling fell upon the individual states, and it is indeed affirmed in their constitutions. However, until very recently no state has taken responsibility for financing public schools (in affluent districts, up to 95 percent of the school money comes from local property taxes), so the tradition of local autonomy has survived. Today, more than 95,000 citizens govern 15,000 school boards across the country.

The Debate in Italy

The American tradition of local control has always perplexed foreign observers. In 1853, a Dutch observer wrote that the system left him "bewildered." More recently, Japanese educators "simply could not understand how groups of laymen could successfully be governing schools."

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Local control is the aspect of the American school system that most puzzles the Fulbright scholars who come every year from abroad to teach in the United States. The premise of local control—that is, local financing of schools—is even more perplexing to foreigners. From the debate on local autonomy, which started in Italy with the 1993 law, it is clear that Italians have no desire for education to be financed at the local level. They believe that it is the responsibility of the central government to pay for it out of income taxes, as it currently does. What they seem to be yearning for is more participation by all stakeholders—parents, students, and teachers—in running the schools. American parents have always been much more involved in school affairs than parents in other countries. In the United States, they are involved in the classroom as room parents; they do fundraising for the school, serve on committees, and run for the school board. In Italy, traditionally, parents have participated much less in their children's education. In some sense, their attitude can be interpreted as an indication that they trusted the system. They knew that their children were going to be taught a clearly defined, rigorous, and systematic curriculum, the same in each school all over the country. They knew exactly what their children were learning each year in each class.

A lot of questions, however, have been raised in recent years. How good are the Italian schools? Are they preparing the students for the challenges of a global market economy? Is the school only for learning, or should it also care about the social and emotional welfare of the students? Italian high school students are active players in this debate. Since the sixties, they have been more involved than their American counterparts with social and educational issues. They are now pushing the idea that the school should be a place where it feels good to be, not just a place to be taught and tested. They claim that the Italian schools are more intent on judging students than on supporting them in the learning process. But

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many people fear that this feel-good philosophy will only lead to a further watering down of educational standards, as has happened in the United States in the last few decades. They point out that the United States is currently trying to move toward more rigorous standards at the national, state, and local levels. In New Jersey, again, in an attempt to define a "thorough and efficient" education, the Department of Education is returning to more traditional definitions of the primary mission of schools as enhancement of student academic achievement and closely related educational services.

These concerns do not appear so much to challenge the basic structure of Italian schools, but rather their philosophy and ideology. However, the general perception is that autonomy is the necessary route toward modernization, and that changes, even if only ideological, cannot take place in a "vertical" structure, necessarily characterized by rigidity and inertia. The argument is that centralization and bureaucracy cause inefficiency and immobility, and make it impossible to harvest either the teachers' energy and enthusiasm or the local resources of the community. There is also a desire to participate in the definition of what the the mission of schools should be in general and in the specific decision-making process in each school. A more open and participatory structure would involve all users and be more sensitive to local needs and preferences.

The debate in Italy is between "wild" and "mild" autonomy, and probably it will be the latter that prevails. The students themselves have opposed the "wild" interpretation of autonomy for fear that it will lead to economic and educational disparities among schools. The initial interpretation of article 4 in terms of "financial, educational and organizational autonomy" of the individual schools has been revised: it is the duty and the prerogative of the state to establish the desired learning outcomes, provide systematic and rigorous assessments to ensure that such objectives are being met, and to license and hire qualified personnel. But the details of the implementation of the educational objectives must be left to the local schools, which will encourage parents' and teachers' involvement and harvest available local resources.

The concept of autonomy, however, has opened in Italy a series of issues very familiar in the United States—the use of vouchers, for example. If the basic task of the state is to dictate learning outcomes and ensure that they have been met, why should there be a difference in financing between private and public schools? A democratic state has the duty to guarantee that education is equitably delivered and meets appropriate standards, but there is no reason why it could not delegate specific tasks to other organizations. On the basis of these arguments, the advocates of privatization have suggested that every student in Italy should be eligible to receive state vouchers to spend in the school of his or her choice. The idea of vouchers, certainly also borrowed from the United States, is an absolute novelty in Italy and probably in Europe. Private and Catholic schools, of course, are pushing this idea very forcefully. They would be the only beneficiaries of the vouchers, since students in Italy can already gain access to any public school of their choice.

The "diversity" argument is making its way into the Italian debate. Catholic schools contend that the Italian school system is too rigid to deal with the differences introduced by the *extracomunitari*, the legal and illegal immigrants from Africa. They argue that, in fact, it has never been able to deal with internal differences either. Unlike what happens in the United States, private schools in Italy traditionally have received students who did not succeed in public schools. They have acted as a safety net for potential dropouts. (It helps that private schools in Italy are less expensive than in the United States). So these schools see themselves as delivering a personalized education that fits the special student, rather than the standardized product of the public schools. The other side contends that often private schools in Italy tend to be parking lots and diploma factories rather than deliverers of any kind of education. In any case, the issue of vouchers has been a complication in the discourse on autonomy that the makers of Finanziaria 1993 probably did not anticipate, and has moved the debate to a completely different track. The teachers unions, which originally welcomed article 4, are definitely opposed to any interpretation of it that would lead to vouchers.

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The Issues in the United States

The American school system is currently under scrutiny, no less than the Italian. A disadvantage of local funding is that it creates disparities among rich and poor districts. For instance, in 1990 less affluent districts in New Jersey spent on education only 70 percent as much as more affluent districts. Philadelphia city schools spend on average $3,000 less per student than districts in the suburbs. In the Chicago area, some districts spend twice as much as others per student ($12,000 against $6,000). This raises the issue of educational equity. How can one expect outcomes to be the same? New Jersey is still wrestling with a Supreme Court order (the 1990 decision in *Abbott vs. Burke*) that requires the state to intervene in closing the financial gap between poor and rich districts. The financial formula proposed by the Florio administration a few years back did not meet much approval. The current administration has proposed its own "Comprehensive plan for Educational Improvement and Financing" whose purpose is to attain equity among all school districts in New Jersey. One idea is to control, via a system of penalties and incentives, the expenses of the rich districts, so as to reduce the gap in expenditures. If this plan should actually succeed in equalizing expenditure across different socioeconomic groupings, it would also go a long way in the direction of regionalization. For one of the main obstacles to regionalization is the economic disparity among neighboring districts, and one of the strongest motivations for local autonomy is the claim that an affluent community should be free to spend as much money on education as it sees fit. (Of course, racial issues often complicate matters.)

The most effective way to ensure educational equity is to change the funding formula from local taxes to state taxes. Some version of this is not so out of reach as it might seem. Last year, under pressure to come up with a more equitable funding formula as well as to control property taxes, the state of Michigan started shifting public school funding from property to state sales taxes. While previously a statewide average of 60 percent of school money was raised from property taxes, now 70 percent comes from state taxes. Although only two cases of district consolidation have yet occurred in Michigan, it is likely that more will follow in the near future. In New Jersey, after more than ten years of lobbying by school districts, in November 1995 voters overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment requiring the state to pay for the school programs that it mandates. Many school districts are strangled by the requirements imposed by the state, and object to unfunded mandates especially when denied any flexibility in implementing them. But if the "state mandate, state pay" amendment is actually implemented, the state might have to start picking up a significant piece of school expenditures, which might put into question the wisdom of the current funding formula. Certainly one of the most striking features of state-local relations in recent years has been the increasing trend toward state control and state mandates, visible not only among traditionally high-control states such as California and Florida, but also among longtime supporters of local control such as Virginia and Connecticut. In spite of the Republican theme of "downsize and decentralize," more state control seems to be the trend of the future in education.

Indeed, state and national governments are already playing a stronger role than ever before in public education, as exemplified by the impetus toward national and state standards. The prevailing notion that two school districts a few miles apart might have significantly different curricula is obviously outdated in these days of high mobility among the school population and high levels of communication. The world our students will enter is characterized by social and economic change, technological innovation, and global market competition. High standards of education are, for any country, the condition for economic stability and prosperity. It is time to reconcile the national needs with the tradition of local authority. Although at the moment the Republicans, opposed to anything that smells like a federal mandate, are trying to stall even the voluntary standards proposed by the various national organizations of professionals and educators, there is no doubt that the standards movement will continue. At the state level, it is certainly progressing. In New Jersey, even the cur-

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rent Republican administration is pushing the introduction of standards as a basic step in the statewide effort to improve education, and meet the equity goals required by the Supreme Court order.

Another example of the willingness of other levels of government to intervene in the delivery of education is offered by the takeover of failing school systems by states and municipalities. After a decade of monitoring the troubled Newark system, the state of New Jersey recently dismantled the local board and administration and took responsibility for running the seventy-six schools in the district. Along the same lines, the state of Illinois recently authorized Chicago's mayor to dismiss the elected Board of Education and appoint his own, after the Chicago schools had for years grappled with financial crises, low test scores, and high dropout rates.

In the meantime, the very format of local school governance in the United States is being questioned. What is unique about the American system is the magnitude of issues and the burden of responsibilities faced by school board members: school budget, school construction and maintainance, negotiations, personnel, and curriculum—all responsibilities that in other countries are dispersed among various levels of government. While such a system made sense a couple of centuries ago, it does not make much sense today. Local negotiations with employees' unions are extremely disruptive to the school community and very disadvantageous to taxpayers. Many management tasks can be accomplished much more efficiently by regional educational agencies. As it is, local boards are left with no time to oversee the smooth running of schools: curriculum implementation and teaching methods' effectiveness, student achievement, and the overall quality of the educational program.

Actually, the problem with U.S. school boards is even worse: local boards are highly politicized; they often include single-issue candidates who care only about their personal agenda; and they are constantly disrupted by internal fights. The extremely low voter turnout makes it possible for special interest groups to fill the board with their candidates. In particular, this is true for the teachers' unions, which are increasingly successful in bringing their candidates onto the school board and in coming thereby to control both sides of the negotiating table.

Is this model of school governance any longer what is often described as the last bulwark of democracy? In 1993, two national reports put school boards in the spotlight, and outlined various possible approaches toward improvement. One recommendation was to nullify school board elections unless the voter turnout is at least 20 percent of the registered voters. State School Board Associations are attempting to rethink the role of local boards, and some states (for instance, Ohio and Massachusetts) have revisited their statutes on school boards' responsibilities. The tendency seems to be toward relieving school boards of their management and administrative duties and stressing instead their policy-making role in interpreting state regulations and mandates and in exercising their home-rule prerogatives.

Finally, in recent years, site-based management of schools has become a very popular model. Together with the shift from property to state taxes, the shift from district control to school self-control quite possibly might challenge the survival of both school boards and district boundaries.

A Convergence on the Horizon?

The trend visible in the American system is that curriculum standards, school taxes, and employees' salaries might eventually be dealt with at the state level. Local school governments would have the responsibility to monitor the quality of the educational program in the schools and the performance of students and staff. They would operate within the curriculum and regulations set at the state level. They would be policy-making bodies that would interpret the state mandates and tailor them to the local realities. They would control a small budget to purchase school supplies and cover minor building maintainance. Moreover, in order to hold down costs, individual districts would consolidate into larger entities for the purpose of sharing services, resources, and personnel.

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This is a model of school governance that would incorporate the already existing "site-based councils" in U.S. schools. It is fully compatible with the fledgling charter schools movement, in which local schools obtain a "charter" to operate independently of the local school system. It is also a model of school governance not too remote from the one that can be found in some Scandinavian countries. And it is not too different from the "mild" model of autonomy that the Italians seem to be leaning toward, a model where the central government pays, mandates, and assesses outcomes, while individual schools or districts adapt the state directives to local needs and tap available local resourses. Italian school districts will continue to be regionalized, as they currently are, and share a multiplicity of management and administrative tasks.

So it appears that the Italian and U.S. systems, coming from two completely different historical backgrounds and under completely orthogonal pressures, might actually be in the process of converging toward similar models of educational structure. □

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Larry Hanley

TROUBLED TIMES FOR PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

Graduate students go on strike at Yale. The California Board of Regents strikes down affirmative action in the University of California system. Massive student marches clog lower Manhattan. Each of these incidents—and many others—testifies to a deep and wrenching, if largely uncoordinated, effort to restructure higher education in the United States, especially public higher education.

As in health care, transportation, housing, and social welfare, the new politics and economics of higher education belong to the campaign—sponsored by Republicans and Democrats alike—to privatize the public sector. Throughout the 1980s as college enrollment rose, federal funds for higher education shrank. Straining to meet their rising share of public university and college funding, state capitals finally threw in the towel in the early 1990s. In 1994, recently elected Republican governors in Virginia, Wisconsin, and New York all pressed for—and largely won—significant reductions in higher education spending. New York's governor, George Pataki, fought for an unprecedented 30 percent cut to higher education. In North Carolina, Democratic governor James Hunt's budget included a fifty million dollar cut to universities and colleges. In many states, this year's funding levels still haven't caught up to the recessionary years of 1989 and 1990. The future doesn't look much rosier: the *Chronicle of Higher Education* recently reported that half of the administrators at institutions of public higher education expect more budget cuts this year.

As governors across the country repeat the mantra of low-tax, low-regulation, business-friendly policies, and as federal and local governments shed their social welfare responsibilities, they are simultaneously shifting the costs of higher education to private citizens. Tuition has begun to replace state monies as the chief source of higher education funding. As the American Council on Education recently noted, 58 percent of public higher education institutions report an increase in the share of costs paid by students and parents. Tuition has risen significantly, in some cases by double digit percentages over the decade, at almost all public universities and colleges. Fees at the University of California, for example, have risen 134 percent since 1990-1991; for the same time period, fees rose 103 percent for the Cal State system and over 300 percent at the state's community colleges. Financial aid—federal and state—has failed to keep pace with these increases, and more students than ever before are working full- or part-time and attending college on a part-time basis. Institutions once considered state-supported now speak of themselves as "state-affiliated." Analysts of higher education talk of a "looming crisis" of cost and affordability, but this is often just another way of avoiding the more explicitly political issue of access to higher education and social mobility.

What this crisis means for students is an accelerating stratification of higher education. Those with the resources to attend private institutions with high tuitions and large endowments will continue to do so. Those who can't will end up in a public system that features larger class sizes, skimpier instructional resources, crumbling infrastructure, and shrinking faculties. With rising tuition, students will pay more for less.

Within public higher education, as colleges

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and universities struggle to cut costs and refurbish their image in the eyes of legislators, they routinely drop the task of "remediation" onto the laps of their underpaid and overworked colleagues in junior and community colleges. Striving to build an "elite" within the public system, senior colleges are beginning to view two-year colleges not as stepping-stones but as dumping grounds for those students who might lower "standards." This despite the fact that "bonehead" English and math continue to be standard offerings at most elite universities and colleges.

Although they pull apart at one level, public and private colleges and universities are intimately yoked at another: the academic labor market. Graduate schools continue to turn out Ph.D.s , young scholars traditionally absorbed by public higher education. Yet, entry-level full-time, tenure track jobs are drying up. The graduate student strike last fall at Yale centered on exactly this job crisis. As the Yale strikers perceived, the new job market is disrupting an old "apprentice" model of graduate study and replacing it with a system of part-time, temporary, seasonal labor increasingly familiar to both blue-collar workers and the managerial work force. As supply outstrips demand, higher education increasingly relies on, and routinely exploits, this cheaper adjunct labor. According to the American Association of University Professors, part-timers now represent 43 percent of all faculty members in higher education.

Although some professors are beginning to describe themselves as the "last generation" of tenured academics, there is at least one expanding job pool in higher education. Over the past two decades, the growth of administrative personnel in higher education has far outstripped both faculty and enrollment growth. From within this group has emerged the outline of a "corporate" model of higher education. Major decisions about education and learning are now often couched in terms like "efficiency," "productivity," and "outcomes." The quality of education is judged by success in spreading resources as thinly as possible. A history department that can cram forty-five students into a first-year class on Western Civilization is more valuable than the department that struggles to keep enrollment in its classes down to twenty-five. In the same vein, driven by the bureaucrat's need to quantify and classify, public colleges and universities pour millions into "outcome" measures like proficiency, assessment, and skills tests. The money spent to test what students haven't learned is siphoned out of budgets for teachers, instructional support, and program development. While neoconservative critics bemoan the university's takeover by "tenured radicals," Marcuse's "totally administered society" rises like a phoenix out of the ashes of the academy.

That these different pressures—budget cuts, tuition hikes, academic labor, and "corporatized" administration—have come to bear on public colleges and universities is no surprise. Since its birth in the land grant universities of the nineteenth century, public higher education has been intimately—often uncomfortably—tied to practical, applied, and technical knowledge. This hopeful marriage of science and labor is now boiling down to mere vocationalism. While humanities, the arts, and the ideal of the "cultivated" citizen are reserved for elite, private institutions, public universities and colleges—which are increasingly blacker and browner—subsist by becoming efficient pipelines into the lower reaches of the information economy. As in so many areas of national life, we are becoming too Victorian; Matthew Arnold's vision of an educated, cultured elite replaces Dewey's vision of democratic education as the de facto reality.

In this era of heightened middle-class anxiety, forces on the right are already busy. In the cauldron of seething middle-class dreams, ambitions, and fears called California, Pete Wilson recently moved on from anti-immigrant Proposition 187 to a successful attack on the University of California's affirmative action policies. While the two campaigns were linked by common motifs of race and resentment, the easy transition from one to the other depended on Wilson's shift from the general specter of the "brown" masses to a more specifically white middle-class anxiety about mobility, status, and affluence. In the suburban family of the nineties, parents subject to corporate "downsizing" worry that their children will lose the chance for an increasingly elusive middle-class security to "state-coddled"

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men and women of color. It is difficult to underestimate the visceral nature of this fear over the prospect that one's children are being denied their right to a better future.

Still, although conservatives have so far bested the liberal-left in defining and exploiting such anxieties, proponents of the "minimal" state may find more than they bargained for in the politics of higher education. First, for all the right-wing mythology that surrounds the welfare state (megalomaniacal beltway bureaucrats, welfare queens, foxholes stuffed with queer soldiers, and so on) public higher education represents one extremely visible place where social democratic values and policies have worked. Most American families boast at least one—often more—almunus or alumna of a public college or university. (Colin Powell, City College of New York '58, is only one recent, much celebrated example.) Public higher education, unlike some other components of the welfare state, enjoys broad approval. In one recent national survey, 73 percent of respondents believed that four-year colleges in their states were doing a good job. Second, public education in America has historically played a key, valued role in mediating the conflict between democracy and capitalism, between the belief in equality and the realities of an inequitable economic system. Finally, public colleges and universities remain one of the few places where people from different classes and races come together on a daily, intimate basis. For these students, many of them older and more experienced than traditional students, self-interest and common interest often blend in ways that encompass—without necessarily obliterating—differences of race and class. If we reframe the battle for public higher education as a defense of equality, opportunity, and mobility, we might clearly and forcefully elaborate the value of common, collective goods in the face of the right's hunger to privatize and individualize all social decisions.

Politically speaking, public higher education may prove even more important to hopes for a liberal-left response to the right. Though we still have much work to do, over the course of the 1980s the number of Latinos and African-Americans in college increased at a faster rate than white Americans. The demonization of political correctness, identity politics, and multiculturalism has depended on the right's ability to exploit the frictions inherent in this increasing diversity. We need to look at things differently.

More blacks, whites, Latinos, and Asians are finding their lives entangled in common institutions, and hence tied to a common fate. One of the least remarked features of the struggle over higher education in New York last spring was the multiracial character of its participants. In New York City, white ethnics, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and African-Americans from working-class and middle-class neighborhoods across the five boroughs marched and chanted (and were sometimes arrested) together because they had found solidarity in a common experience and against a common enemy. Student and union-organized lobbying trips to Albany often brought together white students from upstate suburbs with black and Latino students from the cities. A multiracial, cross-class constituency for the welfare state, and even perhaps for progressive social change, can be organized if it is built from shared social realities like these, not from merely symbolic issues and ideological "discourses."

At all levels, public higher education is in a state of deep and protracted change. At a moment when the post-New Deal compact among workers, corporations, and the state is disintegrating, these changes speak to a fundamental disruption in the social reproduction of labor, expertise, and status. These conditions will continue to make colleges and universities a contentious public sphere. But public higher education is also one place where we can challenge the right's program of defunding the welfare state—where we can clearly draw the differences between the right's values and policies and our own more democratic, egalitarian values and ideals. □

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Martin Kilson

COLIN POWELL: A FLIGHT FROM POWER?

I was preparing to drive from Cambridge, Massachusetts to my alma mater, Lincoln University, near Oxford, Pennsylvania, the day last fall that General Colin Powell announced his exit from what was a kind of presidential campaign. His decision not to run for the Republican nomination both surprised and disappointed me. It also prompted a search for a satisfactory explanation. I began with the *Washington Post*'s account of Powell's withdrawal, which stressed the authoritative role that Alma Powell has played in her husband's life from the start of their marriage until this critical decision.

The *Post*'s argument was familiar; it recalled the role of social status in defining the relationship of certain successful black couples—where the man moves up through marriage, from the lower class or middling middle class into the real black bourgeoisie. As an African-American reared among the middling middle class, I had known about these kinds of status shifts via marriage among black folks, but it was during my years at Lincoln (1949-1953) that I became fully cognizant of this pattern.

Powell and the Black Bourgeoisie

The *Post* article helped me place General Powell's missing will to power in a frame of reference that reveals something larger about the character of key segments of today's black bourgeoisie: a generally weak power-seeking impulse. In his book *Polish-American Politics in Chicago*, Edward Kantowicz has identified a similarly weak impulse among Polish-Americans. But white ethnic groups like the Irish, the Jews, and the Italians, have exhibited a very strong power-seeking impulse—with all the character traits necessary to a focused pursuit of power-by-any-means-available.

General Powell embodies a different set of characterological traits, first described by E. Franklin Frazier forty-three years ago in his *Black Bourgeoisie*. For Frazier, the black elite self-image revolved around a form-deferring persona, an intense and even neurotic attention to the appearance of things. Elite commitment in the black upper class is fulfilled through deference to family, church, social status, and consumerist patterns. Elite commitment is not found in power seeking. For Frazier, this amounted to a defect in the character of the black elite, a defect rooted in historically established racist patterns.

Since Frazier's critique, there has been an important shift toward a power-seeking orientation among American blacks; in the past thirty years a full-fledged black political class has evolved (eight thousand elected officials and four times that many appointed administrators and technicians) along with a broad-gauged class of professionals and businesspeople. Indeed, General Powell and his cohort of African-Americans in the Armed Forces officer corps (12 percent of the corps today) have contributed to a growth spurt in black power seeking. (An overview of this growth is available monthly in Earl Graves's fine journal, *Black Enterprise*, now in its twenty-fifth year.)

Nonetheless, deference to form and anxiety about public life continue to play a large part among the black bourgeoisie. And so it was the chance of a quantum leap in power seeking that excited me (and many other members of the

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black intelligentsia) about the prospect of General Powell mounting a fullscale presidential campaign *with a real possibility of success*. This last point is what would have distinguished a Powell campaign from previous efforts like those of Jesse Jackson. Had he run, Powell's impact on the middle-class and elite sectors of African-American society would have been enormous. So it was rather sad that he didn't have the thirst for raw and messy power. Sad that he is still, in many ways, a bourgeois gentleman. Black folks in America today need the experience of seeing one of their own jousting for power with the whiteboys. Win or lose doesn't really matter; it is the power-jousting that matters. I suspect that General Powell doesn't understand this.

Biracial/Afro-Active Politics

Viewed in historical terms, we are now in the fourth generation in the life history of the black bourgeoisie (assuming its emergence in sizeable numbers in the period 1890-1920). This fourth generation is the first whose members range across all the businesses and professions and function alongside their white counterparts in mainstream American life and institutions (see accompanying table). Yet the same America that has attenuated its longstanding racist patterns enough to bring a full-fledged black bourgeoisie into existence—pushed and shoved all the way, of course, by the civil rights activism of blacks and our white allies—is hardly the colorblind paradise that conservatives describe to us. Black folks are still, also, pariahs in American life, and the deep crisis of the one-third of black households that are poor (and perhaps superfluous to the new global capitalism) reinforces this pariah status in strange and powerful ways.

What should be the trajectory of black politics in this schizophrenic American milieu that is Negrophobic and pluralist at the same time, where blacks are now both "insiders" and "outsiders"? This new Janus-faced status means, above all, that a growing emphasis on biracial politics is fully in order: African-American candidates should appeal to white and other non-

Colin Powell signing his book. *Rick Garharter*/IMPACT VISUALS

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Managerial and Professional Occupations Held by Women, African Americans, and Latinos, 1994

OCCUPATION	'94 PCT OF TOTAL			10-YEAR CHANGE			'94 WEEKLY PAY	
	Fem	Blk	Hisp	Fem	Blk	Hisp	Male	Fem
EXECUTIVE/ADMINISTRATIVE	**43%**	**7%**	**5%**	**28%**	**38%**	**58%**	**$797**	**$541**
Administrators, education	62	12	5	42	14	114	930	634
Administrators, protective services	28	5	6	-	-	-	-	-
Financial managers	49	7	6	33	150	84	889	598
Mgrs, marketing, advertising, pub relations	34	3	4	50	-7	105	1027	631
Mgrs, medicine & health	80	5	4	30	-16	111	850	581
Mgrs, food serving & lodging	45	8	8	-	-	-	485	375
Mgrs, properties & real estate	51	6	9	23	57	67	534	384
Management-related occupations	54	9	5	25	40	56	718	524
Accountants & auditors	52	9	4	27	64	52	724	545
Buyers, whlsl & retail, not farm	55	3	5	31	10	21	534	486
Construction inspectors	7	6	1	-	-	-	616	-
Management analysts	34	6	6	19	38	226	886	737
Other financial officers	48	7	5	-	-	-	817	531
Personnel, training, & labor relations	65	12	6	17	5	52	705	580
Underwriters	67	3	5	-	-	-	-	508
Officials & administrators, public admin	46	13	4	16	31	27	819	630
Personnel & labor relations managers	62	9	6	33	93	91	-	571
Postmasters & mail superintendents	64	9	2	-	-	-	-	-
Purchasing managers	37	2	4	64	-6	59	902	-
PROFESSIONAL SPECIALTIES	**53**	**7**	**4**	**9**	**18**	**60**	**809**	**623**
Actors & directors	41	4	3	-	-	-	-	-
Architects	17	1	4	56	-42	3	765	-
Athletes	22	11	3	20	110	27	-	-
Authors	53	3	3	8	155	314	-	-
Clergy	11	9	3	76	64	220	550	-
Counselors, educational & vocational	68	14	8	26	12	161	764	618
Dentists	13	4	5	115	311	275	-	-
Dietitians	92	14	2	-3	-11	50	-	549
Economists	47	4	3	20	-21	18	-	-
Editors & reporters	49	5	4	6	69	157	671	583
Engineers	8	4	3	34	42	50	907	785
Lawyers	25	3	3	53	43	94	1237	917
Librarians, archivists, & curators	82	10	4	-2	28	95	-	579
Mathematical & computer scientists	34	7	4	9	20	61	874	738
Musicians & composers	32	10	6	15	59	126	-	-
Natural scientists	31	4	2	54	19	-27	773	663
Pharmacists	38	3	4	34	-10	116	963	-
Photographers	28	5	5	41	-46	59	-	-
Physicians	22	4	5	39	-16	2	1063	815
Physicians' assistants	54	6	8	-	-	-	-	-
Psychologists	59	8	5	7	-12	104	740	567
Public relations specialists	63	5	4	30	-18	70	-	530
Registered nurses	94	9	3	-2	22	61	709	680
Religious workers	67	4	7	17	-13	508	-	-
Social workers	69	24	7	8	31	40	564	497
Teachers, college & university	43	5	3	16	6	61	890	771
Teachers, elementary school	86	10	4	1	3	68	650	621
Teachers, pre-K & kindergarten	98	11	5	-1	-8	59	-	375
Teachers, secondary school	56	8	4	9	-1	60	728	664
Teachers, special ed	84	7	4	-1	-42	137	-	619
Therapists	74	8	5	-3	54	29	652	630

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black constituencies and actively seek bipartisan support on issues of concern to the black community. But such a growth of biracial politics does not, in my view, preclude the continuance of some features of black ethnic bloc and civil rights politics—which was always to some degree biracial in character and would have been much more so had white Americans been more forthcoming. Neoliberals and conservatives who today proclaim the virtues of biracial politics as if they invented it are just disingenuous in this matter. Nonetheless, an ambitious expansion of biracial appeals by black politicians is now necessary.

At the same time, the need to challenge the persisting pariah status of blacks in American society requires also an ethnic-bloc dimension in black politics. In the aftermath of the Million Man March last October, we have entered what I call an Afro-activist phase, in which the main political focus is on fusing the black equalization leadership function with community uplift. There have been many previous efforts at a similar fusion, beginning with Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association around 1918. None have succeeded.

The crucial feature of the Million Man March was not what the media (among them, *Dissent*) highlighted: namely, the prominence of the anti-white, xenophobic figure of Minister Louis Farrakhan. Rather, the crucial feature was the overwhelming prominence in the march itself of the new grassroots black middle-class and its occupational associations and networks: black lawyers, dentists, engineers, computer scientists, doctors, scholars, accountants, money managers, businessmen, corporate managers, among many others.

In Philadelphia, for example, my nephew—Thomas Kilson Queenan—who is an architect and holds an MBA from the Wharton School of Business, participated in the massive middle-class groundswell around the March. As deputy treasurer of the city, he helped persuade Mayor Rendell and many city officials to support the organizational effort, making possible a sixty-thousand-member delegation from the Philadelphia area. Farrakhan and his twenty thousand Nation of Islam followers won high visibility through the March; that's what can happen in a pluralist democracy when ethnic groups such as blacks, Irish, Jews, or Italians mount grab-bag coalitional events. But polls continue to show the overwhelming preference of black Americans for, say, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) over the Nation of Islam. The choice of Kweisi Mfume last December as the new executive director of the NAACP should help to consolidate this preference, for Mfume was an early proponent (since 1993) of the fusion of black equalization and community uplift campaigns.

The new biracial politics associated with the Powell phenomenon should be viewed as complementary to Afro-activism. This complementarity was even recognized, at least in outline form, by Powell himself, who made it clear that he did not think that American society was yet a colorblind society. He thus emphasized the continuing need for some form of affirmative action. By contrast, conservative elements among the black intelligentsia insist upon the incompatibility of biracial and Afro-activist politics. This issue will increasingly become a critical marker, a dividing line between competing intellectual orientations, in the black community.

Powell as a Biracializing Leader

At this moment, the possible parameters of a serious biracial politics among African-Americans are still sketchy. This is true mainly because a viable access to bipartisan electoral patterns has been denied African-Americans by the Republican party for more than thirty years. And the denial has persisted despite the broad incorporation of blacks, represented by the new political class, into the American system. For the most part, Republicans have preferred to indulge in cynical backlashing in their electoral appeal to white voters. This situation has only been exacerbated since the 1994 election.

Whether African-Americans fully recognized it or not, Colin Powell's aborted presidential campaign for the Republican nomination was the best opportunity Black America has had in this century to normalize its electoral status. A black professional with a serious commitment to civil rights issues, Powell was also, as *Boston Globe* columnist Derrick Jackson astutely com-

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mented, "the Whites' Great Black Hope." For perhaps half of white Americans, Powell as a possible president radiated an aura of discipline, moral uplift, up-by-the-bootstraps ambition that many Americans find eminently appealing, especially because their typical view of black American realities is one of social disorder and criminality. The pattern of prejudice in American life still allows many whites, maybe the majority, to view African-Americans through the prism of the poorest segment of the black community. So the idea of the whites' Great Black Hope takes on a possible transformative meaning. Powell as president just might, through his exceptional leadership style, have helped to transform the chaotic realities of African-American life. Whether enough white voters could have been mobilized to give Powell the chance to act out that transformative role will now remain one of those big historical questions.

It will also remain a historical question whether Powell as the first black president would have had the political strength and will to liberalize the Republican party's dominant form of conservatism, which works through cynical attacks on unions, feminists, the welfare system, black civil rights. In contrast to this, there is (or might be) a pro-active conservatism, focused on using the resources of both the public and private sectors to address the needs of the black poor and the poor in general, the problems of massive joblessness, deindustrialized cities, underdeveloped neighborhoods, and so on. I have often challenged conservatives who talk about their concern for the black poor to stop talking and act, to fashion a conservatism with a human face. Even small responses like a system of scholarships funded by right-wing foundations for high-achieving poor black school children or a set of grants to assist significant programs of neighborhood uplift would make a difference. Powell might have generated a conservatism of this kind . . . or he might not.

Dilemmas of the Powell Phenomenon

My own variant of pragmatic progressivism enabled me to consider supporting a Powell Republican candidacy, so I said to myself: "Alright, damn it, I will swallow some of my progressivism for a moment just to give a black military hero the chance to function as the whites' Great Black Hope. I will do this even though I am not sure about the outcome with regard to the basic needs of poor blacks." The *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert had a similar response to Powell, observing that Powell was a good man "hanging out with the wrong crowd." As Herbert saw it, "in Powell's case, the wrong crowd is a political party that believes deeply in policies deliberately crafted to hurt the poor, racial and ethnic minorities, and the working classes."

This problematic dimension of a Powell candidacy did not go unnoticed among ordinary blacks. Most polls showed that, in a matchup with President Clinton, only about one-third of blacks favored Powell (compared to about 55 percent of whites). This black response suggests that Herbert's unease about Powell's capacity, as a Republican president, to humanize what Powell himself called the "too harsh" features of the GOP's "Contract With America" was widely shared.

That Powell represented at least an opening toward some new political possibilities for black folks was, I think, both an empirical fact and an ambiguous reality. Despite all the ambiguities, I was willing to contemplate giving him my vote. But he resolved my ambivalence with his own, by revealing an old defect of character: this upwardly mobile member of the black bourgeoisie, like many others, was unwilling to seize the opportunities and accept the risks of political power. □

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David J. Garrow

TURNING INWARD

Black Organizations Regain Importance

Black America finds itself looking down a cold and poorly lit road toward an uncertain political and economic future as the early months of 1996 focus attention on this fall's presidential and congressional elections. Black America is now in the midst of at least four major transformations, two of which are widely acknowledged and two that are appreciated only dimly.

First, and most starkly, the mainstream white political support for affirmative action and minority business enterprise programs that have played a central role in the growth of both the black middle class and an upper-class professional elite over the last generation has shrunk noticeably. Second, the ongoing legal and political battles over minority-sensitive legislative districting—which in the past dramatically increased the numbers of black elected officials at local, state, and congressional levels—have also taken a downward turn. With states such as Georgia and Louisiana facing congressional elections under judicially revised districting plans that have eliminated some black-majority districts, this next Congress may well have *fewer* African-American members—the first such decline in almost a century.

Both of these well-known developments are seen by some political observers as leading to one stark lesson: namely, that for perhaps the next generation, Black America ought to focus more of its energies and aspirations inward, rather than outward toward electoral and legislative arenas. Indeed, the decisions of two of the most influential and well-respected black members of Congress to leave the House and take up other top-line posts—first Bill Gray at the United Negro College Fund and now Kweisi Mfume at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)—suggest that even savvy insiders now believe that the best arena for helping build the future of Black America is organizational rather than electoral.

But there is little doubt that in many ways, most of which are ignored by the mainstream mass media, Black America for at least several years has already been turning inward—and arguably to a degree that has not been witnessed since the years prior to 1954. This shift is potentially momentous, but it does not come with any particular, or any necessarily regrettable ideological loading, for it is a shift that in some ways has characterized people from many different points on the ideological spectrum.

This inward turn is accelerating at the very same time that a second underappreciated development continues to intensify—namely, the increasing economic bifurcation between poverty and wealth that exists within Black America. Millions of African Americans nowadays live in more strikingly divergent economic circumstances than was the case thirty or thirty-five years ago, and although a decline in affirmative action programs may well halt some of the ongoing upward movement, any measurable retrenchment in government social welfare programs is all but certain to intensify the downward pressures being experienced by far larger numbers of citizens.

All four of these transformations are likely to outweigh in long-term importance both of the 1995 events that just a few months ago seemed to be milestones in black political life: the re-

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markable nationwide fascination with and enthusiasm for the public persona of Colin Powell and the unprecedented mass participation that marked the Million Man March.

Powell's appearance on the national political stage heralded something never before seen: the eminently realistic possibility that an African-American could become president of the United States. The self-confidence with which Powell announced his decision not to seek the presidency only stirred further interest in his persona, but his announcement that he was indeed a Republican established narrower parameters for any future Powell political candidacy. Had Powell sought the presidency, even as a Republican, black politics would have been turned upside down, more so than at any time since the death of Booker T. Washington.

But the Powell question, at least in the minds of many hopeful Republicans, including some close to presidential front-runner Bob Dole, is not a closed one. If Dole, as the Republican nominee, were to try to persuade Powell—for American's greater good—to join him on the ticket, Powell would certainly have to reconsider his repeated insistence that he will not be a candidate for any office in 1996. Should Powell end up as the Republican vice-presidential candidate, a realignment of black voting behavior unmatched by anything since the mid-1930s would very likely be the result. And, should Powell become vice president in January of 1997, Americans would likely be looking toward an African-American Republican nominee for president in November of the year 2000.

The longer term import of the other major milestone of 1995, the Million Man March, remains difficult to measure. Outspoken critics of Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan notwithstanding, the overwhelming success of the march seems to have done little to move Farrakhan toward any more of a mainstream role in black public life than he held prior to the march. Most thoughtful observers of the remarkable gathering were quick to credit the dedication and commitment of the hundreds of thousands of participants, rather than Farrakhan's small and secretive band of supporters, with the march's triumph, but dependable ways of measuring the after-the-fact transformative and motivational impact of the event on both marchers and supportive observers are difficult at best. The past history of Farrakhan associate Benjamin Chavis makes it unlikely that any Chavis-directed leadership organization could draw widespread support from African-American civic activists, and the Million Man March, like its illustrious 1963 predecessor, may make its way directly into the history books.

Far more significant than any Farrakhan and/or Chavis organizational initiative is the decision of Baltimore Representative Kweisi Mfume to give up his safe seat and his influential role in the House of Representatives to become executive director of the NAACP. The national news media failed to note how Philadelphia's Bill Gray had made a parallel shift several years earlier—in the hope of sustaining black colleges. Mfume's decision will breathe new life into what at the national level has been a badly damaged and almost moribund organization.

But Mfume's NAACP faces very stark challenges that range well beyond a return to financial and administrative health. Nowhere has local-level evidence of Black America's turning its aspirations inward been more dramatically visible than in the school integration disputes that have strained the links between several NAACP branches and their organizational superiors. A growing number of black communities seem more focused on ensuring the pedagogical quality of their children's education than upon assuring a racially integrated student population. For the NAACP to become a more energetically representative organization within Black America, the organization's tradition of national staffers standing above the aspirations of local chapters will have to change radically.

For almost two decades, students of black civic activism have watched as the tremendous growth in black electoral success—a success especially dramatic in the South since the 1982 strengthening of the Voting Rights Act—has more and more placed black elected officials, rather than protesters or organization executives, in the most prominent roles in black public life. As that trend strengthened, it became increasingly frequent for commentators to suggest that just about all of the "old-time" civil rights

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groups—SCLC, CORE, and the NAACP—had become superfluous in a political context where the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), or the black caucus within one or another state legislature, could wield far more policy clout than any black interest group.

Now, however, events since the Republican capture of Congress in November 1994 suggest that the pendulum may be swinging back in the opposite direction—toward the traditional "old-line" black organizations to which former Representatives Gray and Mfume have moved. Prospects for any Democratic recapturing of a majority in either the House or the Senate seem dim at present, and any numerical shrinkage in the size of the CBC would make painfully visible how the Republican ascendancy has shriveled the caucus's influence.

Clinton administration errors and electoral missteps have cost America the public services of several of Black America's most promising young figures—Lani Guinier, Mike Espy, and Alan Wheat—but Kweisi Mfume's decision symbolizes a far greater potential shift. No, Mfume's considerable strengths and talents notwithstanding, the NAACP will not be reborn in a day—or a year. Most strikingly, in early January the *New York Times*'s Steven Holmes asked a cross-section of African-Americans in New Orleans their impressions of the nation's oldest and largest civil rights group. One local black journalist volunteered that for many people "It's not a relevant organization," but most unforgettable was the response of one twenty-year-old woman, who told Holmes, "I've never heard of them."

That comment frames the challenges and dangers that lie ahead in the best of all possible futures, one where black legislative representation does not shrink and a dramatic increase in local-level community organization is not primarily tied to campaigns for elective office. Such a trend might go hand in hand with a new growth era for NAACP branches, but it would most likely herald a new age of increased activism on the part of African-American churches, a community mainstay whose overall role has been somewhat in eclipse over the past two decades.

However, in a less-than-ideal and far more dangerous future, one with no increase in local organizing, a shrinkage in the African-American electoral presence will go hand in hand with yet further increases in self-destructive behaviors among young people and an ongoing acceleration in community decline. Only energetic participation by black adults—as when parents step in and loudly decry schools that tolerate lax security and poor learning standards—could turn such situations around, and the years to come may well offer far too many high-stakes challenges for black communities all across the land.

In a Black America where some young adults have never heard of the NAACP, the road ahead will almost certainly be long and cold. However, ideologies and partisan preferences aside, Black America may be moving into a new era where private organizations rather than public officials will once again play the most central roles and have the most to offer to their communities. □

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Phillip M. Richards

FARRAKHAN'S MIDDLE-CLASS REVIVAL COMES TO HOWARD

A young dissertation student at the University of Chicago, I first came to Howard to teach composition in the Department of English. From 1978 to 1983, I taught four writing courses a semester for five difficult years. The campus on Georgia Avenue, which I still visit in Washington, D.C., became for me, as it does for many, an important crossroads in the black diaspora's life of the mind. Among the professoriate of color, one talks of Howard and its faculty as easily in Dakar, Chapel Hill, or Ann Arbor as one does at the Library of Congress. "Everyone," meaning every significant black intellectual, "passes through here once or twice," whispered my fellow composition teacher, the poet Calvin Forbes, as we listened in chapel to an emigré Haitian professor question Toni Cade Bambara on African ethnic religions. "For this," Calvin continued, "is a special place for the likes of us." The school, its teachers, certain students, and their institutional life therefore inevitably blend into a collective experience in the minds of African-American writers and thinkers. When I came to Washington, D.C., in early February to research this article for *Dissent*, it was clear that the Million Man March had become part of that informal institutional memory. As even a student might have said, the march was by then history.

As the march was described by the students and faculty to whom I talked this winter, the event appeared to have been transformed into a sacred site of racial bonding, primordial feelings of ethnic manhood, and hope for a black middle-class future. Conspicuously absent from this abstracted vision were the fearful controversies that had swirled for an entire week on D.C.-area radio talk shows like that run by Oliver North. Indeed, in present memory the march came and went with the swift finality associated with religious revivals in rural Arkansas or Iowa. I was therefore not surprised that student and faculty memories had lost the complexity of day-to-day experience or that the march was now the subject of two rather expensive picture books. Whatever Louis Farrakhan's intentions, his revivalistic language of atonement appealed most powerfully to the black bourgeoisie. The fervent response of Howard students shows how little different their politics is from that of the white middle-class Protestant mainstream.

Howard University, like Yale or Harvard, sees itself as a central place: a national black university. This sense of social, racial, and class centrality takes a number of occasionally contradictory forms. Students refer to the university—sometimes ironically, sometimes jokingly, often quite seriously—as the Mecca. The school, faculty, and students evoke this identity in a number of ways: in the circulation room of Founder's Library one still sees vibrant color posters celebrating the work of distinguished emeritus classicist Frank Snowden and the art of emerita painter Lois Mailou Jones. More intangibly, and more profoundly, this sense of centrality appears in the ways that the students signal their middle-class aspirations: the slightly elevated rhetoric, for example, with which they address a speaker at a formal engagement, or their haughtiness with strangers. I was at first put off by this style; but I soon learned to give it a wide berth. In the course of his initial exchanges with students, even the freshman composition teacher finds that their

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contentiousness is a form of pride: which is to say that they have high expectations of Howard, make real demands upon their teachers, and are therefore frequently disappointed by a school whose resources do not allow it to honor the expectations created by its idealized history.

Howard's sense of social centrality is the embodiment of African-American middle-class striving. To be sure, present-day American consumer culture and the identity politics of popular culture obscure this fundamental truth for outsiders, many of whom discerned a broad-based racism at the university in the wake of black-nationalist rallies in the spring of 1994. Like other black American adolescents, Howard students have appropriated the styles and demeanor of the black *lumpen*. Oversized blue jeans, sometimes revealing white underwear, abound among the men as does the obscene macho discourse of the rappers who dominate not only MTV but on occasion the Sunday *New York Times Magazine*. Similarly, Howard students have consumed a black, sometimes anti-white nationalist discourse, which black studies courses have made available in the speeches of David Walker and the poetry of Amiri Baraka. These culturally attuned students therefore take to the speeches of Khalid Mohammed and Farrakhan quite casually, not so much as expressions of an adversary culture, but as part of the university's and the capitalist consumer world's display of odds and ends from which American adolescents in general and black middle-class teenagers in particular select and arrange the elements of their public self-presentation.

One cannot underestimate the lack of self-consciousness with which this cultural nexus has been appropriated by Howard students. Newspaper accounts of black nationalist speakers coexist casually with features about a victorious debate team and student government elections. A case in point is the feature article in the *Hilltop* on Malik Zulu Shabazz, a leader in the now-banned Unity party that sponsored the appearance of Khalid Muhammed. The most critical aspect of this feature is not any discussion of anti-Semitism nor the stridency of Shabazz's discourse. More to the point is his background as an administrator in a congressman's office and his participation in local D.C. ward politics. To the point also is his mock military uniform, which seems to allude as much to a Beatles' album cover as to any political symbolism. Shabazz shares the ethos of Howard not in any will to revolt but in a quite typical political ambition, in an experimentation with cultural symbols available through consumer consumption, in the sprinkling of obscenity endemic to black youth culture. He is a representative of Howard by virtue of his eagerly displayed adolescent black middle-class striver's ethic.

To a large extent, this striver's ethic—which is echoed throughout the *Hilltop*—corresponds to the American nineties' world of self-promotion and free enterprise. Shabazz's demeanor, offensive as it may be, reflects the now-integrated world of late-twentieth-century American capitalism, speaking to its substantial audience of black teenage consumers. And the central crisis of his class is the contradiction between this middle-class ethos and the encroaching realities of a disintegrating black lower-class culture. Georgia Avenue and Le Droit Park no longer retain anything more than a tinge of the bohemian atmosphere of robed young men in converted milk delivery trucks, selling health food and books about black Egypt. All that has been replaced by the new fast food stores—McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Taco Bell. In these venues, one finds not only sleek leather-clad Howard students but elderly hospital patients still in slippers, the urinous mentally ill, angry young derelict men, bearded indigents who spend their days panhandling the wherewithal for a hamburger and a coke or two pieces of dark meat and a biscuit. The aura of Georgia Avenue above Freedman's Hospital is now far closer to that of the southeast urban inferno of far Benning Road than it is to the nearby gentrified Adams Morgan community with its genteel Afrocentric gift shops, Ethiopian restaurants, used book stores, and Senegalese cafés. In a Georgia Avenue Chinese restaurant, the immigrant clerk delivers one's meal with a rude shove that alerts the middle-class Howard student not only to the latest twist of D.C. racial politics but to a now venerable historical narrative shared by Anacostia, Capitol Hill, and Turkey Thicket: the collapse of

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civil community, the proliferation of cheap shops run by Hispanic and Asian immigrants, and finally the free-floating armed violence of the black urban ghetto.

Anyone who spends any substantial time at Howard eventually acquires the alertness of a ghetto dweller. However, the dislocations of black urban life have seeped into the world of Howard student life far more deeply than I noticed on my last sustained visit five years ago. The student newspaper reports fights in the student cafeteria and shows a new awareness of male abuse of female students. Students have been shot on campus. At least one rape took place on campus in the past year. It has become impossible to ignore the realities of lower-class pathology that have insinuated themselves into the institutional embodiment of middle-class black striving.

The pathologies of a lower-class environment are accompanied by the now profound dysfunctions of an administration that was never efficient by any standard. Students confront long registration lines. I watched such a line snake its way around the first floor of the Mordecai Johnson administration building for a day or so. In this time of budget cuts, the school has experienced severe reductions in employment. The interim president, Joyce Ladner, began a radical downsizing of the university. In response thirty-nine released employees have sued the university. The section of the medical school training obstetrician-gynecologists has lost its accredition—a far more than symbolic loss of a unit that has trained most of the nation's black ob-gyns.

These developments point to severe problems in the very infrastructure of the university. Significantly, they have been closely reported in the *Washington Post*. Thus, black students frequently confront not only the inadequacies of a symbolically important black institution, but also see that institution's weaknesses pilloried in the nation's mainstream media. Despite their ethos of "self reliance" and "agency," they are forced to confront Howard's financial dependence upon the federal government and its reliance for its reputation upon a highly critical white media. The black middle class itself depends disproportionately for employment upon the federal government. And Howard students are initiated early on into the full psychological, social, and economic cost of that dependence.

In books such as William J. Wilson's *The Declining Significance of Race*, one finds a picture of a rapidly advancing black bourgeoisie. However, a consideration of Howard's experience in the last few years suggests the psychological and social trauma that accompanies such an advance in the face of a nearby burgeoning underclass. And this trauma forms the necessary context for an understanding of Howard's recent looks at its own past. Located in the Howard Museum on the first floor of the Founder's Library, the photo display "Howard in Retrospect" features stunning displays of faculty, visitors, and students in the growing black institutional world of early-twentieth-century Howard. The exhibit includes photographs of such great academics as Benjamin Mays, Ralph Bunche, Howard Thurman, Charles Drew, E. Franklin Frazier, Alain Locke, Rayford Logan, and Charles Houston. A number of photographs recount the Howard presence of Roland Hayes, Bayard Rustin, Malcolm X, Marian Anderson, Kwame Nkrumah, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Leopold Senghor. Pictures of students feature elegantly dressed groups of fraternity boys and girls. Through many of these pictures weaves the imposing figure of Mordecai Johnson, who gradually emerges as the luminous chief visionary of Howard's middle-twentieth-century identity: the central university of the African diaspora.

This exhibit is, of course, one of the most imposing visions of black American bourgeois life and its formidable intellectual, legal, political, and cultural accomplishments. This is a world in which questions of institutional legitimacy, social pathology, and indeed cultural disintegration seem to be decisively answered. By far the most moving aspect of these pictures may be the response they have attracted in a museum guest book: page after page of student signatories comment on the beauty, elegance, historical significance, and finally the profound emotional impact of these pictures. The curator of the Moorland Springarn, historian Thomas Battle, speaks of the students' deep desire to connect them-

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selves with these pictures. And that desire on the part of black middle-class students is all the more understandable given their sense of the fragility of the present-day black middle-class world of Howard.

In many ways the Howard student body shows important aspects of the striving black middle-class: its mobility thwarted by structural economic change, its ethos debased by the dislocations of lower-class black pathologies, and its own integrity under constant scrutiny by a critical white press—which may often seem adversarial. These characteristics shape the social context in which the student body's response to the Million Man March may best be understood. Farrakhan's rhetoric and organizational strategy was a familiar Anglo-American Protestant ritual of revival. The call for repentance implied a regeneration of the will (whether voluntary or God-given), the creation of a voluntary civic commitment, the reconciliation of Christian society, and the reproduction of the social virtues seen as necessary for the continuity of that social order through time. Significantly, both students and faculty recalled these revivalistic aspects of the march (the march was often referred to as a "spiritual" experience) that clearly spoke to the black middle-class anxieties by which African-American students at Howard are torn.

Speaking to a political science class of sophomores and juniors this winter, I was struck by the number of students who connected Farrakhan's revivalism with an affirmation of autonomous civic virtue. It is too little noticed that much current black rhetoric of "empowerment" and "independence" echoes a traditional Protestant discourse of will. And the notion of a transformed will, morally purged and rationally disciplined through atonement, certainly represents a powerful therapeutic response to an encroaching sense of lower-class pathology (pathologies romanticized, commodified, and consumed through rap, hip-hop dress, and a socially adversarial lower-class black male demeanor). It is to be expected that an insecure striving middle class might experience severe internal psychological conflicts in its casual adoption of ghetto styles. The social-striving nineteen-year-old accounting student in baggy hip-hop pants negotiates a powerful psychological divide that can only deepen adolescent anxieties over future social success and prosperity—anxieties that are naturally deeper for middle-class blacks in the contracting American economy of the nineties. And the depth with which students responded to the traditional evangelical Protestant as well as Muslim themes of atonement and discipline speaks to a profound desire to overcome this conflict.

This desire finds an important echo in the voluntary social efforts—big brother societies, tutoring, and lower-class mentoring—which have sprung up in the wake of the revival. But the most depressed segment of the black American lower-class—estimated to be 30 percent of the African-American population—can only be reclaimed by a radical commitment of the national will to education, health care, and employment policies. One sees in these black bourgeois voluntary efforts not only social benevolence but an effort to assert the autonomy and perhaps the hegemony of class values vital to an effective African-American bourgeoisie that can mobilize the race as a whole. Lost in the discourse of voluntarism and agency is the social reality of a deep African-American dependence upon the government. Indeed the discourse not only overlooks but outright represses the traditional dependence upon the government for employment, and above all employment in social work, educational, and service professions that have the lower class as clients.

The wish-fulfilling aspect of the discourse of agency explains much of Farrakhan's aura in the eyes of black middle-class youth. In the context of the march he became a potent, nearly dreamlike symbol of agency. Student admiration for Farrakhan was grounded in his independence and his effectiveness: his ability and will to do what other black leaders at the time clearly could not do. Indeed, the narrow civic sphere of "self-help" may be among other things a symbolic site by which to reclaim a badly damaged sense of black middle-class efficacy—an efficacy threatened even more by a radically changing economy, a decreasing commitment to affirmative action within the business classes, and a powerful dissemination of lower-class black values through the media.

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Most of the political science class that I interviewed consisted of women. And their response to my inquiries was stunning. They said over and over again that the Million Man March created an atmosphere in which they felt safe in Washington for the first time. For the first time, they felt proud of black men. In very profound ways, the march was devoid of the intra-racial gender tensions that now define black lower-class life and to an increasing extent African-American middle-class experience. In the deteriorating ghetto of Georgia Avenue and Le Droit Park, no well-dressed black female student can walk down the street without solicitation by lower-class thugs, hip-hop male students, or derelicts addled by drugs and alcohol. The march's celebration of voluntary male discipline and virtue seemed to promise an idealized social order of civil relationships between men and women, reclaiming the nexus of gender relations and family stability that lay at the heart of the old middle-class order. The student response to the Howard retrospective points to a similar retreat from the threatening realities of present-day Howard to a cathartically fulfilling past. No one can miss the idealized vision of gender that pointedly dominates many of the early photos. In the present crisis of black youth, no black middle-aged bourgeois man can now fail to be moved by the pictures of elegantly dressed sorority sisters, formally suited young black men—their Phi Beta Kappa keys dangling from dark vests. These images not only speak to the great past accomplishments of Howard but to the damaged confidence and thwarted hopefulness of a class that, like all educated American bourgeoisies, dreams of dignified marriages and cultivated children for its offspring.

Howard faculty are a skeptical sort. Black (and many white) academics who enter the world of Howard from elite white graduate schools encounter the myths and realities of the institution's central place. Generations of black intellectuals have acquired a distinctive self-consciousness here: a sense of marginality not only vis à vis the masses but also in relation to the socially striving bourgeoisie, toward an often materialistic, sometimes cynical, student body, and toward a logistically strapped administration with few resources and (one grants the honorable exception of Mordecai Johnson and a few others) little understanding of the demands of serious academic life. This winter I myself was drawn repeatedly to the museum exhibit and particularly to its pictures of faculty: a restrained, smiling Sterling Brown, the youthful Ralph Bunche, urbanely lost in thought, and the luminous Benjamin Mays lecturing as a proud Morcdecai Johnson takes notes. But no one can miss the fact that these powerfully idealized images ultimately repress the vicious worlds of segregation and black bourgeois pettiness that at once preserved black institutions and kept these men from the cosmopolitan eminence that they so richly deserved. These images cannot evoke the terror and dislocation of Sterling Brown's devastated final years—his alcoholism and the difficulties that he caused his friends. That experience is also part of Howard's golden age. Some of the older faculty, whom I met upon arriving in the late seventies, used to talk of pre-desegregation Howard with a grim smile and a haughty smirk. Meeting me in the Quonset hut to which incoming instructors in the English department had been reduced, the distinguished eighteenth-century scholar Arthur P. Davis greeted me with the vinegary humor that marked his cohorts' view of the brave new integrated world of the late seventies. "This," he said a little sadly, "used to be an elite institution. You," he said with a twinkle in his eye, "are here for the black experience." This older generation knew all too well the myriad ironies of what they sardonically termed the "black experience." And although not all of them agreed with Frazier's analyses of black middle-class life, they continued to find in the new "black awareness" the aspect of African-American middle-class life that he had so memorably described: its craving for cathartic fulfillments and symbolic satisfactions.

The newer generation of Howard professors often disagreed about the ultimate value of the march but inevitably returned to their predecessors' paradoxical discourse of symbolism: this time images of self-affirmation and dignity. To be sure, not all symbolisms are cathartic. One of the deepest paradoxes of this race pride, of course, is that it is grounded in the hard-won

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African-American mastery of America itself. At its most moving, such assertions of self and dignity constitute a profound resource of hope. No disadvantaged ethnic class has looked ahead so movingly to the individual's possibility in America. Russell Adams, the head of African-American Studies, describes his recent encounter with a claque of young black Republicans not only with disbelief but some wonder—wonder, I surmise, that the American dream should persist so long and deeply among America's most oppressed. The African-American experience in the New World has been the most profound dramatization of American creativity. The music of Roland Hayes, the legal accomplishments of Charles Houston are images not only of black American hope but of rebirth in the trauma of New World dislocation. And our wonder at these accomplishments is in some sense our wonder at the possibility of newness itself.

But the anxious emotional fervor with which the students have enshrined the march points less to valid pride in social, cultural, or legal accomplishments than to a desperate self-healing grasp for an eccentric version of an American dream that each day becomes more ephemeral for the nation's white bourgeoisie, not to mention the black middle class. Young people in the march, as at the Howard exhibit, defined themselves in images of community, decency, and ethnic solidarity that repressed the deepest realities of the underclass world by which they were surrounded. As these students looked, they undoubtedly saw the images of the black underclass—whose music, manners, and dress they have casually but unself-consciously appropriated. A purely symbolic and cathartic politics of middle-class benevolence is unable to save the black *lumpen*. And it is now as clear as it was before the march that this underclass will fall through the floor of civilized American life. The Howard students' strikingly American mixture of bourgeois striving and evangelical culture may be only the latest example of this country's culturally ingrained anti-intellectualism and self-serving moral blindness. Like much of the American middle-class population, most students at Howard respond to political trauma in a sentimental style that ultimately evades politics in its deepest sense. I have been critical of these students, but let me say they are no worse than their cultural betters, such as novelist and Howard graduate Toni Morrison. *Sula* provides similar therapeutic celebrations of black female gratification in the face of black male oppression. These students only mimic the literary gestures of their cultural betters. If Howard's cultural orientation does not eventually stimulate radical social movements, then may its ironical self-consciousness—surely the university's finest intellectual tradition—at least give us an African-American equivalent of Melville or Hawthorne—a shrewder critic of the current sentimental fables in which the weak are empowered to outlive the hopeless.

The Million Man March was Black America's profound and somewhat desperate statement of commitment to an American dream. An illuminating unpublished survey by two Howard political scientists, Michael Frazier and Joseph McCormick, found that more than 71 percent of the participants claimed to be from households with total incomes between $39,000 and $100,000 per year. There is, for me, some consolation in this. I do not think that the black male derelicts who warm themselves over subway grates have anything more for which to atone in a country where a tenth of the nation's population appropriates 40 percent of its wealth.

Significantly, two rather pricey books have emerged in the wake of the march. The picture book *Million Man March/Day of Absence: a Commemorative Anthology*, edited by Haki Madhabuti and Maulena Karenga, contains a number of speeches by march participants and public intellectuals as well as pictures of the day's events. This book—to be observed and placed on the coffee table rather than read—represents the heart of the march's middle-class ethos. Within the world of the black middle-class, the march's nationalist symbolism has become one more consumer item. In this consumer culture it was perhaps inevitable that Madhabuti and Karenga would find their truest vocation as shrewd purveyors of nationalist symbols to a nervous African-American bourgeoisie. They and their black bourgeois customers still tread precariously an increasingly straitened American way. Those who seek cultural exceptionalism or political self-consciousness in black bourgeois politics will have to look somewhere else. □

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Carol Stack

HOLDING HANDS

African-Americans Reclaim the Rural South

The exodus of rural African-Americans from the South to northern cities had all but ceased by the 1970s. Since then, the process has reversed. Black Americans have been leaving an urban economy that failed them and returning South. The South has *regained* from the cities of the North the half-million black citizens it lost during the 1960s. For many, the destinations are rural communities that by all statistical measures are some of the least promising places in America—places the Department of Agriculture calls "persistent poverty counties."

The story of this return migration is one of hardships, but it is also the story of how people came back intent on applying hard lessons learned up North to build new lives. Going home requires reworking established relationships between men and women, parents and children, blacks and whites—and between those who never left the South and those who are coming back. Such sweeping readjustment is always emotionally and socially perilous.

It also gives rise to disturbing reflections about current policy on poverty and race. The returnees are creating networks of mutual support, institutions for community action. But these activities have brought them into a collision course with the established white hierarchies, which have done everything in their power to block the creation of grassroots organizations by the poor.

For years, it turns out, officials in these hardscrabble rural counties withheld federal entitlements from their intended recipients. Their misdeeds lay bare the underside of the current debate over entitlements and the move toward decentralization. Shifting the locus of responsibility for entitlements is not just a matter of changing where the money is spent—it also shifts the moral responsibility for the poor to a different set of policy makers. What is happening today may have dire consequences for African-American families living in rural communities in the Southeast.

These communities share a certain statistical profile. They are far from big cities, far from Sunbelt industry, way below national and even state averages for income, and linked historically to the traditional southern cash crops. Blacks have traditionally made up the majority of the population in such places, though the decades of black exodus have sometimes changed the local racial balance.

In researching the story of the return to these places, I criss-crossed nine counties in the Carolinas from the 1980s through to the 1990s. I talked with white public officials across the region, but my study primarily took place among a broad cross section of African-Americans who had gone back to the rural South: professionals, workers, unemployed workers, land owners and people who had lost their land, Vietnam veterans, people starting small businesses, and experienced but out-of-work bureaucrats. Some people were drawn home by rootless, jobless urban decay. Others, made stronger by the demands of urban life, came back to help their kin or out of a sense of mission to redeem a lost community.

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Chestnut County (for the sake of privacy, I have changed the names of places and people) has some twenty thousand inhabitants, 60 percent of them black. In 1980, census-takers had counted fewer than 1,000 people in the county seat, Chowan Springs, and just 467 in Rosedale, the next-largest town. Nonetheless, three women believed that the time had come for an organization that would try to tackle county problems hands-on. The experience of the organization they created, "Holding Hands," is like that of many other new organizations in the regions I came across—groups with names like Mothers and Children, Inc., Chestnut Action for Teenage Students, The Alliance of Women Workers, and The Coalition for Employee Ownership.

The story begins with three women, Collie Mae Gamble, Isabella Beasley, and Shantee Owens, who grew up in Chestnut County as daughters of sharecroppers and as best friends in the 1960s. They cooked, ironed, and did farm chores for their families; they encouraged each other to stay in school. They found jobs selling life insurance and cleaning motels while they worked their way through one or two years at the local college. In the late 1960s, with little or no opportunity at home, they moved north.

Collie Mae Gamble got a job in Camden, New Jersey, processing bids on government contracts. Isabella Beasley worked for a state agency in Newark that administered federal funds for Head Start. Shantee Owens worked in the Bronx in public administration. In 1980, Isabella and her family moved back home. Collie Mae and her husband followed, then Shantee returned.

Back home these women began to focus on local social conditions and the poverty surrounding them. At the same time, they looked for employment themselves. The inspiration for "Holding Hands" could be traced to a backyard barbecue in late October 1981. But the origins actually went much further back, to ways of dealing with the world they developed in their youth; to political skills they honed in the cities as they raised families, ran neighborhood organizations, and worked in government agencies; to painful lessons they had begun learning when the first of them moved home again.

Such backgrounds established these women locally as people to be contended with. Those who had never left Chestnut County had also formed organizations around social issues, but never to the same effect. The concerns they unearthed at the barbecue could hardly have been more basic. If there was somebody without heat, they would bring a load of wood. If somebody's porch steps were broken, if a person needed a ride to town to see if she could get food stamps—or maybe it was just a matter of a sack of groceries to get through the end of the month. Or if there was somebody who just wanted to learn to write his name—well, they could help with that. They could help when there was an old person who couldn't get around any more without a walker, and couldn't afford a walker. And in the summertime, in some of those little old houses that had no ventilation, when the air would get so hot you could see the heat waves ripple around the room, the club could buy a fan. Something as simple as that—little things that would make a difference.

Isabella recalled an organization in Newark called Helping Hands, which got them started on a name: *Holding* Hands. That was exactly the idea, holding their neighbors' hands, helping out at a basic level.

Holding Hands got off on a decidedly businesslike foot. Dues were set at ten dollars a month, and the initial membership goal was one hundred women per county in three counties. By the end of 1981, Holding Hands was incorporated as a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization. By the end of 1982, the women had reached their goal of a hundred members in Chestnut County and had signed up fifty-eight members in Powell County and thirty-one in Harden County. Because cutting wood had become a major club activity, the bylaws were amended to admit men as members. The maximum grant for a family was set at two loads of wood plus a hundred dollars, which usually worked out to fifty dollars in cash and fifty dollars in food. They also supplied sheets, high chairs, toys, kitchen tables—whatever people needed. Families whose houses burned up got a hundred dollars, plus household items and food.

By the end of the second year, Holding Hands was becoming known. The organization

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was honored by several black churches in the region. But everyone was shook up by an article about their group that was published in the local newspaper. A white reporter wrote that minding other people's business is not well received in the county. A couple of weeks later the attacks got personal and Collie Mae was understandably upset.

> I got three phone calls in one day from people who would not identify themselves. They threatened that we better watch out, we're asking for trouble . . . . Isabella got calls, too, and she also got letters, and there were at least three letters we know about that were sent to Social Services to try and discredit us. People found notes on their cars. White folks don't want us organizing, but then they never stop talking how we can't do for ourselves. But I say let's just keep going—cause we're helping.

Isabella kept going too, raising money for Holding Hands, and looking for work herself. Meanwhile, in the short run, she was taking her Amway products—the same lotions and cleaning products she sold to her friends in Newark—to every town for miles around. Anywhere she knew anybody—which was virtually everywhere in Chestnut County's six hundred square miles—she sold her wares and visited and learned about what was going on. One thing she learned was why she was having such a hard time finding a job—why she had been rejected for one job in particular that had sounded like it would be exactly up her alley.

The county social services department had advertised for someone with expertise in administering federal funds. Isabella was interviewed, but the director brushed her off immediately, saying that her background was not what they needed. She was baffled by his rejection until she traveled the backroads of the county for a while and realized that Chestnut had no projects whatsoever funded by the type of federal programs she had been working with in New Jersey. No Head Start, and no day care—zero federal dollars. The only federal money that the social services office administered went for Food Stamps and AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), even though other programs existed that were designed specifically for areas with high levels of poverty—a description that fit Chestnut if it fit anywhere. Local officials preferred not to provide poor people with such services as day care, even if the services could be provided without spending a penny of local money.

Almost 40 percent of Chestnut County's population—nearly eight thousand people—lived below the poverty line. Unemployment was high, but there were many more people working than not working, which to Isabella's way of thinking meant that demand for day care services must be strong. And most of the jobs in Chestnut and surrounding counties paid minimum wage or thereabouts and offered little or nothing in employee benefits—which meant that unsubsidized day care services must be way beyond what most working people in Chestnut could afford.

While working her Amway territory, Isabella visited all the day care centers she could find—scattered here and there in private homes, rundown storefronts, and church basements. Conditions in most of them shocked her: at one overcrowded private operation she noticed missing stairboards, a broken window with jagged glass at the children's eye level, a jug of bleach sitting out on the bathroom floor, filthy for diaper changing, Kool-aid instead of milk at mealtime. Such a place could never pass even a fire inspection, much less meet minimal safety and sanitary standards—and it had a waiting list.

Isabella knew that federal money was available for day care in communities too poor to afford it. Moreover, she knew how to apply for it. She was in a position to make a big difference in the lives of a lot of people. She began by documenting the situation. Two food-processing plants in Chestnut County employed more than a thousand workers, and three other such plants in nearby counties employed two thousand more. A men's underwear factory employed 210 people, and a furniture-maker employed more than 400. Wages in all these industries averaged just over five dollars an hour.

Isabella spoke with public officials, who admitted that they turned back federal programs that permit local options, funds like Title XX, year after year. One administrator told her she didn't believe in government subsidies. Another said it was a point of pride for him that in his county they served very few of the eligible fami-

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lies and that poor people had more self-respect because of it.

Very few of the rural counties with a black majority applied for Title XX day care funds. Nonetheless, Isabella believed she could organize an effort to bring them to Chestnut County; and she knew the people to call upon. The leaders of Holding Hands would help. She called on Collie Mae, of course; and on Eula Grant, who had become a vice-president of Holding Hands; and on somebody else recommended by Shantee, a woman named Maude Allen, who worked as director of CATS, Chestnut Action for Teenage Students.

At the first meeting, which drew women from three nearby counties, Maude Allen asked how they planned to obtain the necessary application forms. Isabella smiled; such a question demonstrated sophistication about the hard realities of local politics. The only way was to circumvent the local social service agencies altogether; the organizers would have to drive to the state capital and request the forms in person. Isabella reminded everybody that government bureaucracy moved slowly. They gave their organization a name—MAC, Mothers and Children, Inc.—and they set up a timetable for fund raising, site selection, and preparing a building for the mandated preliminary inspection.

Over the next several months Collie Mae and her committee arranged for MAC to use the old Shell gas station in Chowan Springs for their initial demonstration project—a model day care center for several counties. They wouldn't have to pay rent, but every inch of the building needed renovation. The women from The Working Women's Curb Market, a highway produce stand, provided MAC with "office" space—a card table and rusty filing cabinet in the storage shed behind the stand. After this, the MAC activists began writing a grant application. Eager to lay groundwork for a close working relationship with state officials, they took a preliminary draft in person to the chief deputy director in the day care section of the Department of Human Services in the state capital. He reviewed their work; they made a point of consulting him about every detail. After eighteen months, the day care center passed the mandatory site inspection and they received official notification of their first grant award.

And that was when the trouble began. Since the funds would go through her office, notice of the grant was sent to the county director of social services in Chowan Springs, a Mrs. Beard. She immediately announced that she would return every penny of the money to the state. That is, she would make it impossible for MAC to use the funds. Isabella went over Mrs. Beard's head to her new friend in the state capital.

> I worried the chief deputy director to death trying to find out what happened to our funds. We had renovated the building and completely furnished it. There were all the little tables and chairs, and the mats, the toys, the playground. We had interviewed day care teachers and assistants, and we had begun training. We had checked eligibility and assembled a group of children—not all black children, either—it was strictly on income. We had everything but the funds.

The chief deputy director sent notice of the grant once again to Chestnut County. This time, the social services department presented the matter to the county commissioners, who were supposed to approve all funds coming into the county.

At the commission meeting, Mrs. Beard made no secret of her department's opposition to public support of day care. Most of the commissioners were like-minded, but Maude Allen had anticipated the tone of the meeting and at her suggestion MAC had packed the meeting room with the children who were set to attend the new center. They sat together in the first three rows of grownup-sized chairs. And the parents and ministers and MAC board members who had come prepared to speak never had to say a word; day care funding was approved by a murmured voice vote.

From then on local opposition to MAC was limited to behind-the-scenes tactics. Bureaucrats stalled, politicians filed to reduce the allocation, clerks said they couldn't locate the funds, officials forgot about appointments and forgot to file papers and forgot how to write a check. Eventually, the commission informed MAC that the funding was secure, and that it would be administered by none other than the county director of

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social services, their good friend Mrs. Beard. The MAC women learned to maneuver around her, and to become accustomed to delays, broken promises, unmet deadlines, and the unmet needs of parents who trusted them.

After three years, MAC, Inc., was able to change the funding process so that money went directly to their projects. But local attempts at sabotage continued. Shantee told me:

> Our saving grace was that we created alliances across at least three counties. When this all got started we could have been in, you know, competition. But then we started helping one another out. If one group was having trouble getting the money—political problems—well, one of us from another county would call the state capital for them, help them out with our direct contacts.

By 1986, MAC was operating six safe and sanitary day care centers in three different counties. More than three hundred children were supervised by trained staffs. Fifty new full-time jobs and a couple of dozen part-time jobs were created to staff the centers. By 1995 these numbers had doubled and serious institution building had taken root within these counties. Just as MAC emerged from the training ground of Holding Hands, other groups began to make a difference in the 1990s. New leaders, who honed their political and organizational skills in established organizations, were encouraged to develop sorely needed services and advocacy groups. A variety of worker cooperatives, coalitions for economic justice, worker advocacy organizations, and small businesses spun off. They thrive by virtue of the help that flows from one organization to another. These networks are indispensable. Each success, however modest, continues to provoke anxiety and resistance among local white bureaucrats.

Holding Hands and MAC, Inc., represent a new type of organizing activity in poor rural communities. As efforts in grassroots mobilization and self-help, they cannot fail to impress. But serious and sustainable services in desperately poor rural counties require funding that turkey raffles and fish fries can never provide by themselves. Nor will contributions from the handful of black business and professional people in these communities suffice. These projects might be aided by large industries, but the precedent is not auspicious. Corporations in places like Powell and Chestnut counties have never supported local organizations in the black community. Local tax support could also help, but political resistance has remained steady.

In the midst of so much ill will, outside money is a critical resource. Dogged self-help can support some small initiatives, but where many people lack the minimal necessities of life, government action has to play a role.

In the mean-spirited, anti-government mood of the 1990s, indeed, everyone seems eager to pronounce on what the poor really need. What they need, people tell us, is not government handouts but individual or community self-reliance. Let government withdraw from the affairs of the poor, then. Or, if there is to be any federal role in supporting the poor or the weak, let it take the form of block grants, lump sums given to the states. The good folks there are closer to "their people," the story goes; they will know better than Washington bureaucrats how best to use these resources.

This rhetoric comes from those who were never much concerned about the well-being of out-of-work and needy citizens in the first place. But the experience of those returning to their rural roots lays bare a dismal reality. When local power-holders attempt to subvert attempts by black communities to provide even obviously needed services—firewood, say, or safe child care—only a fool would trust these authorities to administer block grants.

Block grants—that is, lump sums of federal money given to the states for the general purpose of helping the poor—are a step in the wrong direction. This change in welfare policy, terminating federal guarantees of cash assistance for poor children, will have frightening consequences, especially in rural regions of the Southeast. In these localities the people who proclaim most loudly the urgency of self-help—the bureaucrats and politicians—are the same people who work to thwart actual self-help organizations. If block grants are enacted, the next chapter of this story can be written even before this new intervention hits America's back roads. There is still time for a different ending. □

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DISMAR

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Joel Rogers

WHY WE NEED AN INDEPENDENT POLITICS, AND HOW TO BUILD IT

The bottom line of Michael Kazin's potpourri of political hunches, reportage, and prescription ("Alternative Politics," Winter 1996) is that progressives should support Democrats in 1996—hardly an item of controversy among this or other readers of *Dissent*.

Kazin's broader argument is that supporting Democrats is the *only* thing that electorally minded progressives should do, now and forever. On his view, there is no progressive "alternative" politics—operating on or near a ballot line but independent of the Democratic party—that is not stupid or hopeless or worse. To advance their values, sensible progressives must first declare their loyalty to the Democratic party and then work only within it.

I think this broader argument is wrong. Indeed, coming from as thoughtful an observer of the American political scene as Kazin, I find its narrow sense of current political choices a little strange. When good people make bad arguments, it is usually because they are asking the wrong questions. Kazin's question is whether progressives should work inside or outside the Democratic party. I think the right question is, *"Not knowing now just where the Democratic party is heading, what sort of electoral organization should we be building now to advance our values?"*

Kazin's Democrats-or-bust conclusion follows from his dim assessment of the chances of various "third parties"—the New Party among them. What he has to say about the New Party is usually mistaken: that we concentrate on nonvoters, that we think they are everywhere more progressive than the active electorate, that our municipal work is inattentive to program, that we are based in "liberal enclaves," that we have no more interesting a view on the current requirements of governance than making big government even bigger. Even casual inspection of our literature, membership, or actual program activity would show the inaccuracy of all this. I wish he'd called before sitting down to write.*

Kazin also seems unaware of New Party success in ballot initiatives on campaign finance, "living wages," and other signature concerns of precisely the progressive politics he endorses. And he misses (the news came after he wrote) the New Party's recent success in restoring the "fusion" option to American politics—the right of a minor party to nominate a major-party candidate on its own ballot line, with votes cast on that line counting against rivals. Such cross-nomination permits minor party voters to declare their principles at the ballot box without sacrificing their prudence—to show support for a minor party *and* the "lesser of two evils." Critical to the success of those nineteenth-century third parties Kazin properly regards as serious, fusion has long been banned by the major parties for just that reason. Now the New Party is bringing it back—most recently, in a unanimous decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit striking down state bans on the practice—in litigation that will fundamentally change the rules of the American electoral game.

But forget about "third parties" for the moment. The real issue is not what we call an "independent" (that is, value-centered, organization-

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ally self-sufficient) progressive electoral politics, but that we do it. The real harm done by Kazin is not to the New Party's reputation but to the effort to discuss how that might be done. The most important problem to be addressed is how to attract the resources and technically adept players (often now in both uncomfortable and close relations to the Democrats) it needs to work. And the beginning of wisdom in solving that problem is to reject the notion that building something independent of the Democrats means building something that will wreck them.

The fact is that nobody knows quite what the Democratic party will look like in ten years' time. Maybe it will turn into a social democratic party, maybe it will continue its rightward drift. What we do know is that progressives are now losing, that we need an electoral vehicle, that the Democrats do not now provide the right one, and that however distinct the termini of the traditionally competing projects of electorally minded progressives—realigning the Democratic party, starting a serious third party—they require much common work at their beginning that is not being done and should be.

Let me defend these propositions in turn.

• We "progressives"—defined almost however you like, but certainly to include all those still enamored of the idea of government by and for the people—are in the fight of our lives and losing badly. What's at stake now in Washington are not just the programs of the New Deal or Great Society, but the very idea of a democratic society in which ordinary citizens exert some real control over the terms of social life. Whatever the ebb of Republican fortunes or flow of Democratic ones, that basic democratic idea has receded in American public policy. Whatever the many successes of progressive organizing, the fact that we have falling wages, rising inequality, millions of impoverished children, rotting cities, rollbacks in environmental and consumer protections, and "democratic" elections bought with private money demonstrates overall failure.

• This failure is unnecessary, because a mass audience for progressive politics in fact exists. A generation of economic decline and failed government response has not only made American politics ugly. It has also created an enormous potential base for our signature issues—greater social control of the economy and a democracy strong enough to enforce and enable it under competitive conditions. There is vast implicit demand for imposing some standards on corporate behavior, for making values matter in how we run our economy and distribute opportunity and reward. And there is vast demand for a more responsive and effective "government"—public authority and institutions more truly by and for the people, tailored to present circumstances, accountable to popular aims. Satisfying these demands could be the basis for a new mass democratic politics—a politics that would get progressives out of their marginal ghetto and into the business of running the country.

• Success in that politics, however, requires that progressives get their electoral act together—that we build electoral organizations at least as competent and inventive as the retail organizing and public interest advocacy that currently preoccupy us. We must be visible and active in *electoral* areas for several reasons: because for most Americans "politics" *is* voting, and we will never be able to demonstrate popular support for progressive values unless the ballot box provides an opportunity to do so; because we need direct power in the state to improve things, including the terms of our organizing outside the state itself; because only a progressive movement disciplined (as elections do) by the need to win mass support is likely to say anything sensible and believable about program (about how we propose, under different economic and social conditions than those of the 1930s or 1960s, to restore democratic values to the self-governance of this society). Our electoral activity also needs to be based in an *ongoing organization*—not just another or a series of one-shot campaigns—because only such an organization will have the incentive or ability to recruit and develop candidates, support and hold them accountable once in office, or develop such a program.

• Whatever it once was or may become, the Democratic party is not now that organization. In part, this is because the ideological center of the party has shifted distinctly to the right—a point evident from a glance at Clinton or the marginality of folks like Paul Wellstone. In part,

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it is because the party itself is too weak and disconnected from its mass base to mount a coherent progressive alternative, hold members accountable to its pursuit, and mobilize the mass support (often against substantial business opposition) needed to carry the day. Whatever the innovations at the Democratic National Committee, there is very little "there" there. Very little connection to constituency organizations outside the electoral cycle, very little mass training or ideological support of candidates of the sort that would get them to want to act together, very little pooling of party resources to offset the endless defections and self-indulgence of millionaire donors and candidates.

So we progressives have a serious problem. We need a progressive, values-based, technically adept, at-scale electoral vehicle to organize and promote a new progressive program appropriate to our times . . . and we don't have one.

What to do? Kazin and others urge reforming the Democratic party from within, and only from within. Welcoming their ends, I disagree on means. After all, progressives have pursued the "reform from within, and only from within" strategy for sixty years, and they have failed; after billions of dollars and millions of votes, labor and blacks and other loyal Democratic constituencies don't have a hell of a lot to show for their efforts. And while there is very little evidence that the party itself has the resources or inclination to engage in the organizational and programmatic revival needed, there is much evidence that its corporate gatekeepers do have veto power over anyone attempting such revival within the party's structure.

I conclude that without some sort of organization of their own—eventually, an organization capable of mounting a credible threat of exit from the Democratic party—the votes and dollars of progressive constituencies will be taken for granted by the Democrats, we will never get significant numbers of accountable people running for office, and we will never get our programmatic act together. So I favor building that organization.

The question, of course, is how to do this in a way not poisonous to Democratic health vis-a-vis the Republicans—how to keep the perfect from becoming the enemy of the good. Call this the "Do no harm" constraint.

Well, here's how. Start by inviting some of those progressive constituencies together to articulate a popular program focused narrowly on the issues on which we all agree—essentially, social control of the economy and a democracy strong enough to achieve it. Enter important non-partisan races (school boards, city councils, county boards—where the number of offices is almost limitless, but the issues are nearly identical across sites). Do mass candidate trainings and slate campaigns based on a common program, integrate union and other progressive voter lists at the local level, and win. Supplement these candidate races with initiative campaigns on issues like living wages. Take over the city councils of most of the nation's biggest cities, and show what popular economic reconstruction might look like. Take over the school boards, and show what high quality public education might look like. And, along the way, generate a huge number of worthy potential candidates—drawn more extensively from our own ranks, and accustomed to working as part of something bigger than themselves—for higher level office.

This would be a lot of good work, with a lot of result. And since the races are non-partisan, it could all be accomplished before even engaging arguments about the wisdom of a "third party."

As regards partisan races: "Do no harm" requires that we not run against Democrats (unless they are truly as bad as the Republicans) if we cannot win. Disciplined by that rule, let the ability to win independently develop where state chapters want to develop it; otherwise just run people inside Democratic primaries. But run people. Run our people. Build the machine. And notice that in a fusion environment the only-in-the-Democratic-primary vs. on-our-own-ballot-line choice is substantially moot, since we can always cross-nominate Democratic party nominees (whether we've helped make them that or not) on our own ballot line.

Such an organization wouldn't impede progressive support for progressive Democrats. But it would ensure that we have something of our own after we helped elect them: an electoral organization dedicated to our values, that would

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help unify the now fractious progressive community, provide a distinctive programmatic voice, and demonstrate our strength at the polls.

I say do this work and do it well for a couple of years, and *then* reenter the deep discussion of "Whither the Democrats?" Whatever the conclusion of that discussion, we'll be in much better shape to act on it than we are now.

That is all the New Party is attempting to do. Instead of confusing such a practical effort with something else, I'd invite Michael Kazin, the new leadership of the AFL-CIO, the readers of this magazine, and millions of other disheartened progressives to join it, shape it, and make it a success. If we need to change the name of the effort for that to happen . . . let's change it. If we need somehow to get better protection for institutional players now dependent on the Democrats' goodwill . . . let's work that out. Whatever. But let's do it, and let's do it together for a change. Let's build an independent progressive political machine.

Michael Kazin Replies

I thought it was only the corporate breed who cut to "the bottom line." At any rate, Joel Rogers protests too much. The purpose of my comments on the New Party was not to bury what is clearly the wisest of the embryonic alternatives. I only sought to identify weaknesses that its organizers should recognize and may be able to fix.

And, for the record, I read some of the party's literature, heard its executive director speak at length and respond to many questions (in that hotbed of populist rebellion, Wellfleet, Mass.), and interviewed several sympathetic reporters who've covered the organization.

Rogers does, however, focus on the two main questions: (1) How to build a sizable constituency for the New Party?; and (2) Are the Democrats worth the (left's) time and effort?

Unfortunately, he skips too blithely past matters of program and vision in his rush to get to the means of building an "independent progressive political machine." One reason why our side has not been doing well is that we seldom question the equation of a stronger national state with what Rogers calls "the very idea of a democratic society." One doesn't have to be a theorist of "civil society" to recognize the need and growing desire for more vital, participatory institutions at the workplace, in neighborhoods, in schools, and in houses of worship. It isn't just that Americans no longer expect the state to solve their growing problems; many are not sure that, acting above society, it either could or should. If the New Party plans to grow strong on rhetoric about "a more responsive and effective government," I fear for its survival. I too vibrate to the old-time religion of social democracy. But it's not good enough for most voters.

I applaud the concept of fusion and cheer the New Party's attempts to break the legal barriers against it (fighting for proportional representation would be a much bigger victory—and a lot harder to win). But "Do no harm" is only a strategy, not a way to inspire skeptics or mobilize the confused and apathetic.

I remain convinced that the best, and perhaps only, way to attract sizable numbers of Americans outside the ranks of the usual "progressive" suspects is to involve them in specific, massive efforts to change the nation—its wage structure, its health care system, its treatment of children and the aged. When established politicians shun such impassioned but rational efforts, then people may be ready to join a third party. The News (yes, they do need to change the name) will only become significant as motivators and perhaps leaders of a growing movement, not as architects of a clever maneuver for the already persuaded.

And that's where the Democrats could come back in. I like the image Rogers draws of a big coalition backing local candidates who endorse its major issues. Ralph Reed likes it too, so much that he and thousands of his fellow organizers have been turning the picture into reality within

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the Republican party since the late 1980s. Six decades ago, the CIO and its allies were engaged in an analogous task when they transformed local Democratic parties in industrial towns from California to Pennsylvania. A bit less than thirty years ago, anti-warriors generated enough pressure to force a liberal president to step down. There's a lesson in that history. The major parties *have* yielded to mass demands, though not always and never as much as ideological partisans would like.

Obviously, it won't be easy to capture the hearts and minds of today's divided and dispirited Dems. Environmentalists, feminists, unionists, and stalwart champions of interracial community are often preoccupied with playing defense—and understandably so. But I don't see how joining the New Party will lighten their burden. As Rogers surely knows, the necessary court challenges and media explaining gobble up time and money.

It's been a generation since any serious effort was made to redefine the Democrats from the left. "Make America Truly Democratic—Take Back Your Party" is surely as attractive a message as "Leave the sinking ship to Bill Clinton and his lackeys." The new Campaign for America's Future—organized by Robert Borosage, Roger Wilkins, and others—seems dedicated to that task. And, right now, "old" party candidates for local and state offices and even the House of Representatives can run and often win on a platform identical to one Rogers and I would favor.

So may the New Party mature and prosper. At the very least, it can force Democrats leftward, if only for their self-interest. But no "machine" can get very far without a healthy movement to drive it. □

James B. Rule

NATIONALISM NEAR AND FAR

Dissent has always taken pride in its openness to a range of democratic and egalitarian ideas, its refusal to impose a "party line." This makes for bracing intellectual exercise, as one follows the converging and colliding trajectories of its editors' ideas in the pages of the magazine.

In the Winter 1996 issue, for example, we find Michael Walzer deploring the widespread and uncritical support of October's Million Man March of black Americans on Washington, D.C. He worries over the willingness of good folk like editorial board member Cornel West to endorse an event orchestrated by and supportive of Louis Farrakhan and his followers. The march, he regrets, "established nationalism and some kind of moral rearmament as a substitute for civil rights politics." Walzer is obviously also deeply disturbed by Farrakhan's extravagant and categorical disparagements of ethnic and social groups other than his own.

Walzer is right. Anyone who supports figures preaching repression of those different from themselves, on grounds that the would-be repressors nevertheless serve some greater good, is playing a dangerous game. Should Farrakhan and his movement start putting their repressive views into action, a lot of well-intentioned people will have egg on their face.

Then, on the Editor's Page of the same issue, we have Mitchell Cohen's words of admiration for slain Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. He scores Rabin's political opponents for failing to grasp that the control of territory is "not a fetish, but a means to reconstruct a people." Against the actions of such "zealots," Cohen seems to suggest, Rabin's willingness to deal

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from strength was statesmanlike. He could take the high road, it seems, because he was a "security-minded man."

Very delicately put, that last point. As defense minister in the 1980s, Rabin commanded the Israeli forces that put down the protests of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians—with "might, force and beatings," to use his words. According to an Israeli human rights group, the army and secret police beat or tortured more than twenty thousand Palestinians during this period. The problem with these people was their ingratitude at the role assigned them by a state predicated on the supremacy of a faith and ethnicity other than their own.

Rabin has since been lauded as a man of peace. The designation is accurate, as far as it goes. It's not just that he signed peace agreements with the Palestinians (highly one-sided, to the Israelis' advantage). He also helped make these agreements possible by softening up the opposition. In any grave political conflict, one of the most effective ways of securing peace is to shoot and maim some of your opponents. This helps those remaining to settle down and adopt a more compliant outlook. If the situation is one where an entire ethnic or religious group is seeking supremacy over others occupying the same territory, a lot of this kind of peace-making is apt to be required.

Rabin never shrank from this project. His role was to protect all the Jewish citizens of Israel, from those espousing ideologies of God-given destiny to rule over others to those who simply crave a space where they can be on top. His differences with his Israeli opponents—from Benjamin Netanyahu to Baruch Goldstein—had to do with how much coercion would be necessary, and over how much territory. The project of ethnic supremacy was not at issue.

Now, back to the American scene. One wonders whether current trends will lead to widespread revival of nationalist claims for an African-American state on what is now U.S. territory. Such an idea, to judge from the popularity of the Million Man March, could command considerable support—both from figures like Farrakhan, who openly despise those different from themselves, and from more moderate figures who might simply feel that their efforts to "reconstruct a people" require a state in which people like them can be assured of supremacy. One could imagine the new nation-state extending, say, from New Jersey to Virginia, with Washington, D.C., as its capital.

Michael Walzer, I presume, would oppose such an idea. Perhaps one reason would be the repugnant program of ethnic hatred projected by figures like Farrakhan, who would surely play a role in such a project. But there would, I trust, be a still more far-reaching objection. To wit, establishment of such an ethnic state could only be accomplished by dispossessing millions of those not belonging to the newly constituted dominant group—or by rendering them second-class citizens in the places of their birth and origin. Such draconian measures would be unjust in themselves, and would surely set the stage for bitter and intractable conflict. Instead, Americans must own up to the burden—or, more positively, the opportunity—of creating a world of equality and recognition for the full diversity of ethnic, racial, and social groupings. This would be a world where political institutions and social arrangements pose no barrier for any person or group because of their identifications.

If I anticipate Walzer's views correctly here, I couldn't agree with him more.

Mitchell Cohen Replies

Jim Rule, a valued *Dissent* colleague, and I have a very sharp disagreement. In the aftermath of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination, I wrote in praise of this man's revolutionary transformation while prime minister; it brought mutual recognition between the PLO and Israel, and the beginning of the end of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, despite furious opposition in Israel by right-wing and religious Zionists. Rule responds, in effect, that little differentiated Rabin, Baruch

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Goldstein (the religious right-winger who slaughtered scores of Palestinians at prayer in Hebron two years ago), Louis Farrakhan, and, by implication, me.

This is more curious than "bracing." After all, Rabin, who denounced Goldstein's "loathsome, criminal act of murder" (Rabin's words), was slain by someone with Goldstein's worldview. Rule's ire, I suspect, comes from something other than Rabin: he objects to all forms of nationalism, including that of an oppressed population, as racist. And he objects especially to the existence of Israel.

Yet a brief glance at history reveals that there are different types of nationalism and nation-state. They have played different roles, depending on time and place—sometimes exclusivist and murderous, and sometimes democratic and the means by which a population responds to a history of subjugation. Adolph Hitler was not Thomas Masaryk. The same is true for ethnic solidarity—it is justifiable or not depending on circumstances. If a Grand Wizard of the KKK proclaims the need for white solidarity, it is obviously pernicious, if not ludicrous. If African-Americans feel a sense of solidarity among themselves—if blacks in New York feel that a racist assault on a black in Mississippi is also an assault on them—I find this to be the most natural response in the world. And this sense of solidarity is not reducible to Louis Farrakhan.

Rule employs what I'd call "slippery slope" reasoning, much like Friedrich Hayek, the right-wing political philosopher beloved by Reaganites and Thatcherites. Sure there may be social pain, Hayek admitted, but create a welfare state, meddle with the market, and you are on a slippery slope to totalitarianism. Sure, anti-Semitism was vicious in the last century, Rule would acknowledge (actually I so credit him since there is no obvious recognition of its seriousness in his comments), but respond with a Jewish state and you slide into a "project of ethnic supremacy."

Quite a leap—or skid—of imagination, in both cases. Not that there haven't been leftists who were Stalinists and Zionists who were racists, with some rotten consequences. But this doesn't mean that one thing always collapses into another—only that Stalinists and racists should be fought and that all states should have secure civil liberties, whether or not they have an ethnic majority. At the same time, I don't find it inappropriate when deprived and injured populations demand special considerations. Working people, laboring under miserable conditions had (and have) the right to insist on a different, fair social order—and they have the right to look askance at anyone suggesting "rugged individualism" as the proper response to their suffering. Workers are not exploited simply as individuals, but as workers. Jews, having suffered centuries of relentless persecution, culminating in the greatest racist mass murder in history, were right to insist on affirmative action, that is, on a state of Israel as part of any fair world order—and they rightly look askance when someone rushes to advise: forget it, be "universalist." Jews were not persecuted as individuals, much less as universals, but as Jews.

Not that I'm against individualism or universalism. To the contrary—I'm just against the simplistic kinds, and especially when they are indignantly propounded abstractions that ignore the historical experience of real human beings. This is also why the logic of my arguments applies no less to the situation of African-Americans. They have been victims not as individuals but as African-Americans and rightly look askance at those who contend that race is a non-issue in this country.

Hence the moral legitimacy of affirmative action in my view. Rule apparently thinks I ought instead to favor carving an African-American state out of the United States, by analogy, evidently, to Israel. This is simplistic universalism at its most simplistic. Beyond what's obvious—that prejudice everywhere should be fought—why is one political prescription applicable in all circumstances? Whether or not an African-American state is a useful or intelligent response to racism in this country depends on the circumstances of this country, not on those that led to Israel's birth. Actually the idea of carving out such an African-American state (in the southern "Black Belt") was advocated in the late 1920s and early 1930s—not by nationalists, as one would expect in light of Rule's assertions, but by the American Communist party, which was also vehemently anti-Zionist. The plan originated, it seems, with a Finnish Comintern official, one of Stalin's flunkies, who was equipped with his idea though with little sense of American re-

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alities—black or white. No wonder it attracted few adherents and failed.

One lesson I draw is that it is best to keep away from slippery slopes, especially in the form of political argument; better to take a circumspect look at how and why persecuted people opt for this or that response to their predicaments. Indeed, one can hardly find a more striking case for Zionism than Rule's dismissive attitude to Israeli security concerns—as if they are reducible to Rabin's repression (which, I agree, was brutal) of the Intifada. History began before the Intifada. Surely Rule recalls the Russian pogroms of 1881, when Jews were ravaged in some two hundred towns, leading to the birth of Zionism; and surely he recalls the Dreyfus Affair; and the pogroms of 1905; and those in the Ukraine in 1919-1920 (as many as a hundred thousand dead); and then Auschwitz. Yes, given all this, Zionists did want to reconstruct a very battered people; and that is what they were thinking about in between pogroms, not "ethnic supremacy" over others.

Surely Rule recalls that the Zionist mainstream, led by Labor, accepted compromise with the Arabs over and again during the British Mandate. Surely he recalls that Israel was assaulted by half a dozen armies on the day of its birth in May 1948; and that Azzam Pasha, head of the Arab League, warned of "a war of extermination and a momentous massacre which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacres and the Crusades"; and that this was three years after the Holocaust, during which the preeminent leader of Palestinian nationalism, Haj Amin el-Husseini, was in Berlin championing the Nazis. I'll leave aside all the ensuing history up through the Hamas suicide attacks, and just point out that one need hardly approve of all Rabin did throughout his career to understand why he was "security-minded" or why Israelis might appreciate this.

So it's not that Zionists were always angels—they weren't. It's that there are, in the end, two ways to look at the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. One way sees it as tragedy in the most profound sense, a complex clash between two rights and two historical imperatives, with wrongs committed by both sides. The other is easy and absolutist; it imagines that all right and all wrong slide to one side or the other. If Rule wants to believe Israel never had security problems, that in decades of bloody conflict every act by an Arab was the fault of an Israeli, that Rabin "never shrank" from seeking "supremacy over others occupying the same territory," that is his privilege. But that is all it is—it isn't history. Ironically, when I called Rabin "security-minded," it was not to argue with anti-Zionists, but with right-wing Zionists, for whom any Israeli offense can be blamed on an Arab, and who conflate security with integral nationalism to camouflage the fact, well understood by Rabin, that an intelligent assessment of military strength may allow you to rethink things, to change policies, to hold a hand out to the Palestinians.

Hence, in the aftermath of Rabin's murder, I called for repudiation, in no uncertain terms, of calls by Zionist right-wingers for "unity" of Jews, Israelis, and their friends. Such nationalist claptrap usually has an ulterior agenda, in this case to subvert the peace process. Yet here, again, Rule's slippery-slope perspective misses the point because it finally must reduce all forms of Jewish solidarity to Jewish chauvinism. In fact, my position toward Jewish and Israeli politics is the counterpart of that taken by African-American critics of the "Million Man March," who refused to embrace Louis Farrakhan, that Meir Kahane of Black America.

Unless I have misunderstood people like John Lewis, Major Owens, and Julian Bond, they are trying at one and the same time to be cosmopolitan—upholding a humane, egalitarian vision for the country as a whole—and particular, that is, rooted in the specific problems, historical pain, and, therefore, the needs of their community. So they repudiate Farrakhan for his detestable vision of America but no less because they won't countenance defining African-American solidarity by Farrakhanism. Theirs must be a complex politics—something also familiar to Jews who at once hope for social justice in America and a fair deal for Palestinians and Israelis in the Mideast. It is also a difficult politics, not least when calls for chauvinist solidarity come from one corner and thinly disguised calls for abstract universalism come from another. But it is the right politics. □

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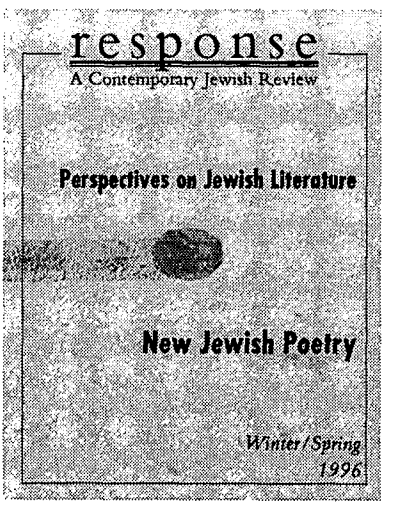

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Jo-Ann Mort

SHEILA ROWBOTHAM'S FEMINISM

Woman's Consciousness, Man's World

Recently I found myself discussing the dawning of contemporary feminism with two young women—one a first-year student at Brandeis and another a senior in high school about to enter Brandeis. My cousin—the high school senior—was writing her senior thesis on the founding of *Ms.* magazine, a topic destined to make me feel old. Her friend, who was lending her reading material from a Brandeis women's studies course, explained that she found the course interesting, *even though* the professor was a socialist-feminist. "I'm not a socialist," she quickly confessed, making it clear that her professor was a relic from another era. How times have changed—from the day when the only Brandeis students who would dare to admit that they weren't socialist were those who found socialism reformist!

The conversation made me recall my own college days and the fierce battles over feminism we had at Sarah Lawrence College almost twenty years ago. The college was co-ed by the mid-seventies, even though many of us still described Sarah Lawrence as a women's college that admitted men. Already, cultural feminism had the upper hand. One of the crucial issues on campus was whether straight women could be feminists. Feminist theory was enmeshed in the thicket of lifestyle questions. I was drawn to a different feminism and joined a group of students clustered around the women's history program. *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* by the British Marxist historian Sheila Rowbotham was one of our revered texts.

When Rowbotham came to campus, she gave a talk to a small group of professors, women's studies graduate students, and a few stray undergrads in the basement of the student activities building. I thought of that day after listening to my cousin and her friend dismiss socialist feminism. They wore the same costume as I did in college, yet their flannel workshirts and jeans masked a new generation of feminists whose legacy was not my own socialist-feminism, but the very different feminism that has dominated the last several decades. A strange turnabout as I, the fortysomething socialist-feminist dressed in designer garb, sat beside these two sincere young women decked out in their grunge, while they dismissed socialist-feminism as one for the history books. It seemed like a good time to go back for another look at Sheila Rowbotham's argument.

Her book came out in 1973, just a decade after the book that launched the modern feminist movement in America and throughout the West, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan's book set off a revolution among middle class suburban women by discovering the problem that had no name, "a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States . . . . Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. . . ."

Friedan recounts the founding of NOW, the National Organization for Women, which became the premiere feminist organization in the United States. She and several other women started NOW in 1965 after President Johnson reneged on a promise to ban sex discrimination as part of Title VII in the 1964 Civil Rights Act. NOW's founding principle was to bring women into "full participation in the mainstream of American society." Friedan makes no apologies

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(nor should she) for the dilemma of her constituents: "We, the middle class women who started [NOW], were all poor, in a sense that goes beyond dollars. It was hard even for housewives whose husbands weren't poor to get money to fly to board meetings of NOW."

Yet, in retrospect, this feminism's birth among the early constituency of NOW—upper-middle class women—along with the emphasis that Friedan and NOW placed on women's joining society instead of changing it, have left women today with a dilemma. Emancipatory victories brought with them the notion of women "having it all," which means a career, a family, and a sense of self. Trying to have it all has left a generation of younger women liberated, but more than occasionally frustrated.

It's so damn hard to have it all! Unless society adapts itself to the dislocation of women from more traditional family and economic settings by creating alternative models of family and economy, having it all is practically impossible except for wealthier women. Some class of women has to be involved (since most men won't be, as empirical evidence tells us) with child rearing and house cleaning, even if this means rearing someone else's children. Upscale women have it all by leaving their children in the care of other women, often immigrants without health benefits. Working-class and some middle-class women work alternating day and night shifts with husbands or extended family members, or take on additional jobs to pay for child care. Increasingly, women climbing up the corporate ladder are frustrated by a workplace that hasn't adapted to modes of work that would allow top executives to enjoy a family life.

When women joined society, as NOW suggested we do, we joined a society that wasn't built for us. No wonder a new generation of women is questioning the feminist revolution. Rowbotham's book—which argues for a social transformation of work and family life—has only grown more timely with age. Women must demand and fight for change if we are to enjoy the full range of possibilities promised by contemporary feminism. The identity thing has been resolved; young women today have a sense of full personhood. Friedan's feminism is a success; that's no small triumph. But it's not enough.

What if Rowbotham's book had become the bible of modern-day feminism instead of *The Feminine Mystique?* Where would we be now? Decades later, it's problems of economics and society that plague women and hold us back, frustrating the promise of women's liberation even among the classes of women who have made the greatest advance. One result of not forcing society to change has been the so-called "backlash" against feminism. If society isn't going to re-arrange itself to enable women to work outside the home and if men aren't going to disrupt their own lifestyle, woman are going to get forced back to the homefront.

The feminism of the last few decades never reached to the working classes, let alone the working poor, where Rowbotham begins her examination. Today, the middle class may boast more women in the workforce in all sorts of jobs once thought to be "untraditional," but this shift is attributable as much to the precipitous forty-year drop in real wages as to equality of the sexes.

The Republican assault on women through the disguise of "family values" gives the socialist-feminist debate, as represented by Rowbotham, central importance. The economic squeeze puts problems of family and work on everyone's mind, but so far, the right wing has succeeded in setting an agenda that offers no viable alternative for women. It's precisely among today's middle class and working poor—where job security, child care, and decent public education are at issue—that Rowbotham's feminism could have resonance.

Sheila Rowbotham's feminism grew out of a radicalism informed by labor history and its reports on the lives of ordinary people. "The sound of silence breaking," she writes, "makes us understand what we could not hear before. But the fact that we could not hear does not prove that no pain existed. The revolutionary must listen very carefully to the language of silence. This is particularly important for women because we come from such a long silence." She was tempered by the politics of the sixties, of the anti-war and the civil rights movements. Her more radical feminism was the feminism that didn't happen. It's a feminism that's familiar to *Dis-*

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sent readers but never became part of mainstream political discourse. It's confusing, decades later—especially for a new generation of activists—to realize that NOW and its feminism wasn't left-wing at all, because today NOW appears to be a key organization on the left.

The dilemmas Rowbotham poses not only weren't resolved, but have resurfaced with a vengeance in the United States in the 1990s. Once women are removed from the family hearth, the nature of the family changes. Women's consciousness changes, as Friedan pointed out, as soon as they leave the isolation of the home. But so, too, does the economic underpinning of the family. Capitalism gobbled up women for the workforce at a moment when it was opportune for capital. "When the ruling class grows sanctimonious about the preservation of the family," Rowbotham explains, "they mean in fact the need to preserve the division of labor which best secures profit." Remember the quaint notions of a family wage or of women staying at home to cater to their husbands' whims, enabling them to be rested and fed before facing another work day? Those days are gone, no matter what a Newt Gingrich or Phyllis Schlafly says. "The family," Rowbotham argues, "is . . . [a] dummy ideal, the repository of ghostly substitutes, emotional fictions which dissolve into cloying sentimentality or explode into thrashing, battering, remorseless violence."

Which doesn't mean that we ditch the family. Rowbotham, in the quest to combine the personal and the political, says that the family still "represents the only possibility of personal life." But she doesn't say what kind of family. Her definition is similar to Robert Frost's, who once wrote that home is where, when you go there, they have to take you in. Family, writes Rowbotham, "is the only place where human beings find whatever continuing love, security and comfort they know." Yet, "the monogamous nuclear family has become such a preposterous ideal that it sags with the weight of its unrealized hopes . . . ."

It's ironic that conservatives keep trying to hold the nuclear family together without dealing with the external issues that weigh upon it. The assault on workers and the necessity of two wage earners put strains on the family that can be relieved only with government intervention in the form of social programs. In a 1995 Labor Day essay in the *New York Times*, economist Lester Thurow wrote, "Falling real wages have put the traditional American family into play, as the one-earner middle-class family becomes extinct. With children needing ever-more-costly educations for ever-longer periods of time, the cost of supporting a family is rising sharply just as earnings plunge . . . . More than two million children under the age of thirteen have no adult supervision either before or after school. Paying for day care would use up all or most of a mother's wages." This is life for millions of women and men.

"Women are carrying the preposterous contradiction of love in a loveless world," Rowbotham writes. "They are providing capitalism with the human relations it cannot maintain in the world of men's work." But, as contemporary feminism progressed—and as economic necessity increased—women have been increasingly unavailable to do the domestic work necessary to maintain these "human relations."

"If it were admitted that the family is maintained at the expense of women, capitalism would have to devise some other way of getting the work done." But capitalism never did. Today, families are in crisis, houses are dirty, and children are without care. Frozen food is making a comeback. McDonald's is the restaurant of choice for many working mothers, and among the yuppie class, every form of food delivery and takeout service is utilized. The burden still falls on the woman to be primary caregiver, even if she's working full time or overtime. Either things get done or they don't. Either women are able to carry a double load or they are not. But the fabric is fraying—even ripping apart—no matter how women have managed to adapt.

Today, it's accepted that women work outside the home—but not merely because they demand a liberated or equal identity, nor because men may agree with the new rules. More likely, it's because most women need to work for pay, whether they live alone or are part of a family. "Many men are suspicious of their wives achieving the status of wage-earner, because money—

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even a little money—means power and independence," Rowbotham writes, reminding us of the days when a woman's paycheck was looked upon with chauvinist suspicion, instead of a smile and an outstretched hand. Today, of course, a little bit of extra money can determine whether families have food or no food on the table or whether middle-class or even upper-middle-class families will be able to afford college tuition for their kids.

One of the failures of contemporary feminism has been its inability to embrace the majority of working-class women, many of whom find arguments about culture and identity foreign to their own situation. Rowbotham, who has continued to write about working-class and union women since this book appeared, chronicles their dilemma. "Women are at the bottom, the work is an extension of familial roles, hard work appears disguised and the pay is low . . . service and minimum wage jobs . . . ." One can easily imagine that this was written last week, not more than twenty years ago.

Her section on women and unions is unfortunately as prescient today as it was in 1973. Rowbotham complains that there are very few women represented at the top of unions and that women are "not often militantly organized at the base. The whole orientation of the trade unions is masculine," she writes, describing the British Trades Union Congress.

Even though women represent increasingly large numbers of the organized workforce—and are the part of the workforce most likely to gravitate to unions in organizing campaigns—the union movements in the United Kingdom and the United States have been slow to let go of masculine dominance. But things are changing, especially in the United States. The new AFL-CIO leadership, by including Linda Chavez-Thompson—a Latina—as executive vice president, and by expanding the executive council to allow for greater diversity, is searching for ways to make women a more active part of organized labor. It's not an accident that the new president, John Sweeney, headed up the Service Employees International Union when that union was devising the legislative strategy for the Family and Medical Leave Act and supporting "9 to 5," an untraditional union local that organizes female office workers. Rowbotham's insistence on "new forms of organizing which connect work and home" could find a receptive audience among a new crop of union leaders. Indeed, Rowbotham anticipated the present-day need of working women to move beyond the wage issue and of unions to move beyond the traditional workplace-centered collective bargaining model.

Rowbotham's concentration on women as low-wage and contingent workers is also as critical to increasing workers' power today as it was years ago. Sweatshops and work without benefits are on the rise not only in developing countries but increasingly in the United States and the United Kingdom, especially among immigrant and undocumented women. Rowbotham's argument that women "need to find a new notion of womanhood which will give them as a group the dignity and solidarity essential for industrial organization," is not only important for women today, but could prove decisive for the new labor leadership and a revival of organized labor.

"We come into women's liberation out of our specific predicament as women, not as people who necessarily are committed to the creation of socialism. . . . [but to] the political process of making an effective movement for the liberation of women—which [requires] a movement in which working-class women are in the majority." It is here that the modern day women's movement has failed. This failure has placed feminism at a crossroads. Raising standards from the bottom up raises all women. After decades of success for a certain kind of feminism, it may be that even younger women who find the notion of socialism hostile would today be open to the concepts of socialist-feminism. Call it whatever they like, a reborn feminist movement that finally took on the reorganization of society could find no better primer than Rowbotham's book. □

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David Glenn

THE PROBLEM WITH THE *BAFFLER*

The *Baffler* is a Chicago-based political and cultural journal produced by a circle of writers, activists, and musicians in their twenties. But you knew that already: for the last few years, the buzz surrounding the magazine has been difficult to miss. It's been profiled and praised in dozens of places, including the *New Yorker*, the *Nation*, *Lingua Franca*, and the *Toronto Star*, which called it "the smartest and most exciting magazine in America." All this attention has placed a burden of high expectations on the eight-year-old *Baffler*. As its own promotional material humbly puts it, "*The Baffler* is turning out to be to the American 1990s what *The American Mercury* was to the 1920s or *The Masses* was to the teens."

Despite all the praise, the *Baffler* has had distribution problems and isn't easy to find. When I finally stumbled onto a copy in early 1994, I turned straight to the much-celebrated essay "The Problem With Music," an eight-page rant against the rock industry by the guitarist and recording engineer Steve Albini. "The Problem With Music" turned out to be as good as its reputation. Where most punk manifestos are moralistic and rhetorical, Albini is hilariously exact and concrete. When he discusses smug, obnoxious music industry personnel, he's talking about specific people, and he names them. When he says that major-label contracts are rigged to enrich everyone but the musicians, he gives us the math—a two-page balance sheet—that explains how. This is terrific, I thought—it may not go down in the annals with *The Jungle*, but "The Problem With Music" exposes an industry's follies and misdeeds with a witty, unpretentious anger rarely heard on the left these days. I wondered: why aren't there more public voices like this?

As I read further, I saw that the *Baffler*'s creators are obsessed by this very question. At a moment when business is consolidating its power in Washington, astonishingly few people are raising their voices in mistrust or anger. As *Baffler* editor-in-chief Tom Frank puts it in an essay called "Why Johnny Can't Dissent,"

> When the twentieth century opened business was only one power among many, economically and culturally speaking. . . .While it might mistreat workers, break unions, bribe editors, and buy congressmen, its larger claims and authority were limited by an array of countervailing powers. It does not require a rosy sentimental view of any past period to recognize that today there are no such countervailing forces.

The *Baffler* has a story to tell about how we have reached this point. The rising "information" industries—described here variously as "the Culture Trust," the "artisticocommercial complex," and the "spectaclist regime"—have captured and defined our collective culture. We have lost qualities and resources essential for imagining and defending a just society—patience, community networks, historical memory. We drift instead in a consumerist haze of "lifestyle choices" defined by the advertising industry and its handmaidens in the Culture Trust. As Frank argues, "Denunciation is becoming impossible; we will be able to achieve no distance from business culture since we will no longer have a life, a history, a consciousness apart from it."

In advancing this argument the *Baffler* draws on several traditions of left-wing skepticism toward mass culture. At times, as when it says that

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the culture industry "[teaches us] to be good citizens" and "[brings us] warmly into the consumer fold," the *Baffler* recalls the Frankfurt School; elsewhere, as when it denounces the uses of nostalgia in consumer culture, it echoes Christopher Lasch. The magazine puts all of this forward in polemical essays, pranks (an investment profile of a firm called "Consolidated Deviance, Inc."), fiction (including the ongoing tale of the skilled-but-anxious lifestyle consumer Gedney Market), and an advice column called "Semiotics Mailbag." It's not hard to see why the *Baffler* has drawn so much attention—the complete package has a rare energy and wit.

The magazine's strongest accomplishment is issue number seven, "The City in the Age of Information," published in late 1995. Here the *Baffler* dissects contemporary elites' notions of public space and the city. As tourism replaces manufacturing as the foundation of urban economies, downtowns are being reconceived as glibly commercialized "historic districts" along the lines of New York's South Street Seaport. Some thinkers (including Newt Gingrich) have cheerily predicted that the Internet will render cities obsolete; others have trumpeted "Edge Cities" (areas like the computer-industry corridor on Route 128 outside Boston) as the future of urban community. Tom Vanderbilt's essay on Edge Cities illustrates how well the *Baffler* at its best weaves together political and cultural criticism:

> [W]hat Edge City boils down to is not only an economic and cultural distancing from people of a different race and class, but a purposeful withdrawal from involvement in and responsibility for the greater politic of the city. In Edge City, the architecture perfectly embodies this principle of detachment. Driving across the George Washington Bridge into the Edge City of Fort Lee, N.J., one faces straightaway the intimidating specter of defensible corporate space: the dull-metallic reflective armor of one tower sits atop on its own stacked parking garage, a fortress unto itself; while nearby another building—resembling a vertical ice cube tray—looms like a violent and alien blemish on the landscape.

Unfortunately, the *Baffler* is usually not at its best. Several of issue number seven's essays are excellent; but there is a problem, a serious one, with the magazine's project as a whole. The *Baffler* is doing a good service by steering our attention toward the worst banalities and lies of contemporary advertising and business culture. As it points out, if you want to understand who rules America you need to read not only *National Review* but also tomes like management consultant Tom Peters's *The Pursuit of Wow!*. After bringing these wretched cultural products before us, however, the *Baffler* employs them to buttress an odd mixture of uncompelling arguments about our political and social crisis. One of the magazine's favorite targets is cultural studies Pollyannas—academics who suggest that popular culture is the central engine of human liberation and political resistance. Fair enough; but mass-culture *skepticism* on the left has its own traditions of overheated and incoherent claims, and at various times the Cassandras at the *Baffler* have endorsed too many of these.

Let's begin with the *Baffler*'s portrait of its central villains—the handful of multinational corporations who make up the Culture Trust. There are plenty of valid reasons to be alarmed by the consolidation of the media industries; receiving all of our news through the filters of six or seven companies can't be healthy for democracy. The *Baffler* gives these concerns their due, but it also goes further, into a vulgar structuralism that suggests that the Culture Trust actually *dictates*—not just exploits and amplifies—every facet of popular culture. In 1993, the *Baffler* played a role in exposing the "Great Grunge Prank," in which gullible journalists from London and New York, dispatched to profile the so-called Seattle grunge scene, were duped into reporting that nonexistent slang terms—including "wack slacks," "cob nobbler," and "swingin' on the flippity-flop"—are the mark of the authentic

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West Coast hipster. The *Baffler*'s account of all this is hilarious, but it ends with the following earnest prediction, which in its own way is as naive as anything written by the reporters in question:

> As anyone knows who has actually spent any time in indie rock or ever been to a show in Seattle, no one actually uses these expressions. But you can be certain they will soon . . . although kids in Seattle may never actually say things like "Harsh Realm" and "Big Bag of Bloatation," their peers and their parents will, all over Europe and America. Regardless of its origins, this is the vocabulary the masters of Hip have decreed you will use, and they're not about to back down now.

Please raise your hand if you believe teenagers in Budapest today are calling each other "cob nobblers."

The *Baffler* plays similar games with a press packet from the Quaker Oats company. The packet purports to describe an emerging demographic group, "granolas," who are the central target market for Quaker Chewy Granola Bars. It includes a cartoon drawing of a happy granola couple and their allegedly typical lifestyle accessories: "environmentally sympathetic cosmetics," "mountain spring-fed water," "rag wool socks," and so on. Now, anyone who hasn't swallowed Marcuse whole would see this packet as the pathetic result of a marketing manager's wasted afternoon. But the *Baffler* sees an insidious power in the cartoon:

> Thus the business of defining the public mind in our unhappy land: if this lifestyle didn't exist already, it will soon, complete with all the accessories Quaker has designated for it. The expensive-looking mailing we received undoubtedly cost a thousand times what the *Baffler* will run, and its words will undoubtedly have a thousand times the effectiveness.

Quaker may be helping to commodify a subculture and render it banal; but far from *creating* a "granola lifestyle," Quaker is clumsily laying its finger on trends that are at least two decades old. The Culture Trust plays this sort of catch-up all the time. (One example among many: rap music's popularity and profitability were established on small independent labels for several years before major corporations began to invest in it.) Where the cultural studies Pollyannas attribute too much power to cultural consumers, the *Baffler* makes the opposite error: consumers hardly ever appear here, except as passive objects of the Culture Trust's designs, waiting to be taught to say "cob nobbler."

All this cynicism sits uneasily next to the *Baffler*'s advertising—the full-page ads taken in every recent issue by independent and semi-independent record labels to promote postpunk luminaries like Pavement, Yo La Tengo, and Liz Phair. So the magazine sells indie rock, and several of its writers are members of indie rock bands; but it almost never discusses the pleasures and meanings this music's audience takes from it. Perhaps this is because a close scrutiny of these questions might puncture another of the *Baffler*'s central beliefs: that there is a clear and useful distinction between independently-distributed punk rock (the best of which embodies "an aesthetic of genuine dissent" and is "the scream of torment that is this country's only mark of health") and corporate-distributed "alternative rock," which is fraudulent and co-opted.

There are several things wrong with this framework, but I want to focus on just one of them. Let's grant the *Baffler*'s claim that the postpunk bands that have made the leap to major labels and mass popularity are uniformly "watery, derivative, and second-rate." Although several of the bands in question are self-consciously "political," the *Baffler* declares that the *only* messages they transmit to their large audiences are those of vacuous rebellion, "cartoonish postures of sullen angst or teen frustration." This is silly; the cartoonish postures may be what makes postpunk useful to the culture of advertising, but that doesn't mean that the music's more genuinely rebellious meanings have been absolutely bleached away. Even the lamest expressions of corporate-level "alternative culture" *do* sometimes stir their audiences. As Ann Powers wrote in the *Village Voice* last year, "[Difficult] to prove, but nonetheless traceable, is the path that leads from being a Pearl Jam fan to volunteering at a center for child abuse victims, or from frequenting the Body Shop to becoming an environmentalist, or from reading a Toni Morrison novel to organizing against racist poli-

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cies in your local school district."

This is not to say that all's well with the world; every item in Powers's sentence—from the art of Pearl Jam and Toni Morrison to contemporary environmentalist politics—is deeply imperfect and deserves our sharpest skepticism and criticism. Nor is it to suggest that institutions of the self-identified left should spend more energy creating or celebrating agitpop. It *is* to suggest that the *Baffler*'s creators have chosen a too-easy method of understanding the "co-optation" of the music they love most. Counterposing heroic independent punk rebels against demonically powerful major labels involves its own kind of posturing.

The *Baffler*'s various rhetorical excesses might be forgivable if the magazine were conceived squarely in the tradition of the *American Mercury*. We might then read it as the product of a hypercynical, Menckensonian older brother—someone interested strictly in keeping us honest, in debunking our stupid and sentimental impulses. But as its advertisement correctly notes, the *Baffler* is also partly designed as an heir to the *Masses*. The *Baffler*ites are not strictly debunkers, but people who believe in the possibility and urgency of rebuilding an effective radical politics—once the detritus of the advertising culture has been cleared away.

It is in this respect that the *Baffler*'s obsession with the Culture Trust begins to look like a gigantic evasive maneuver. One of the magazine's most attractive aspects is its tone of rage; it's the only journal that captures the way I feel when I read the newspaper in the morning. But upon close inspection it appears that the *Baffler* sustains this tone only by sidestepping or ignoring the questions that have put the rest of the left press in a worried and chastened mood: how to define and fight for racial and gender justice; what kinds of responsibilities to entrust to the state; how to rebuild faith in egalitarianism and public institutions. The *Baffler* implicitly argues that we could address these questions more effectively if we paid more attention to the larger fabric of our culture—to the ways in which the mass media have shaped the public imagination. This is certainly true. But the *Baffler*'s *particular* analyses of mass culture are generally too shrill and simplistic to be useful. The ferocity and clarity of the *Baffler*'s prose are rare and valuable; it's heartbreaking to see them employed in the service of such half-baked arguments. Here's hoping that issue number seven is an omen of better things to come. □

LET THEM EAT CAKE!
A Version for the Nineties

A column from the commissioner of New York City's Human Resources Administration in an employee newsletter urged caseworkers to look at things from the client's point of view.

The "new reality" of welfare means that fewer clients will be found to be truly eligible for aid. "Those who are denied assistance react in a variety of ways," says Commissioner Marva Livingston Hammons. "One reaction, that of anger and desperation, requires even greater understanding on our part. Being on the receiving end of a frustrated client's demands is not easy . . . Emotions run high on both sides. Even so, it is never acceptable for an HRA employee to do things like *curtly and rudely advising a client to eat out of a garbage can.*"

(emphasis in original)

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Richard Rorty

SINS OF THE OVERCLASS

THE NEXT AMERICAN NATION: THE NEW NATIONALISM AND THE FOURTH AMERICAN REVOLUTION, by Michael Lind. The Free Press, 1995. 436 pp. $25.00.

One of the most useful things intellectuals can do is to invent a term or phrase that floodlights a new social situation. Society is constantly throwing up problems that are too diffuse and too complex to grasp until someone comes up with a short, snappy way of describing what is going on—one that, as soon as it is heard, strikes one as exactly right. Marx's term "reserve army of the unemployed" spoke volumes, even to those who had not read the books in which it was first used.

Michael Lind, a young ex-conservative, has introduced the term "overclass" into our political vocabulary. This word has quickly come into extensive use, and has been very helpful in defining the central problem that America now faces. Lind defines "the white overclass" as "a small group consisting of affluent white executives, professionals, and rentiers, most of them with advanced degrees, who with their dependents amount to no more than a fifth or so of the American population." He describes this overclass as "the first truly national oligarchy in American history." His description of that overclass, and of the inequities that enrich it, is brilliant political polemic.

Much of the content of Lind's book can be inferred from a single sentence: "The two most important trends in American society since the 1960s—the proliferation of racial preferences, and the decline in average wages and benefits—both serve the collective interests of the white overclass." The greatest weakness of the book is its awkward attempt to put these two trends on the same footing. *The Next American Nation* is oddly unbalanced, for Lind devotes as much space and energy to denouncing affirmative action as he does to warning us against the growing power of the new oligarchy.

This lack of balance is most evident in his periodization of American history. He makes a good case for saying that the "First American Republic," which he calls "Anglo-America (1789-1861)," was succeeded, thanks to waves of immigration, by a Second: "Euro-America (1875-1957)." His chapters on the formation and development of these two "Republics" are intelligent, informed, and plausible. But when he tries to convince us that Euro-America was succeeded by "Multicultural America (1972-present)"—the Third American Republic—he is less successful. When Lind urges that this Third Republic should not outlast the century, but should be succeeded by a Fourth ("Trans-America"), one feels that periodization has gotten out of hand.

"Trans-America"—described as "a color-blind, gender-neutral regime of individual rights" combined with "government activism promoting a high degree of substantive social and economic equality"—is a good American utopia. But this is only because, if we ever get social and economic equality, we may not have to worry much about race and gender. If there were lots of good, satisfying, well-paid jobs for everybody, then it is likely that, thanks to the changed climate produced by the civil rights movement, ra-

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cial discrimination in employment would gradually disappear. If everybody who wanted to could get hired and stay hired, then the "last hired, first fired" tradition, which has kept African-Americans poor, would probably vanish, as would the culture of the urban ghetto. Thanks to the consciousness raising undertaken by the women's movement, it is likely that, given those idyllic economic conditions, women who wanted to stay home with the kids could do so without worrying about how to buy food and medicine for them. Women who wanted work could find it. Take care of class, and race and gender might well take care of themselves.

But Lind is not content to put off repeal of affirmative action legislation, and the inauguration of color blindness, until these idyllic conditions obtain. His case for this repeal is based on moral principle, rather than economic consequences. So his book combines high-minded claims about the unAmericanness of racial preferences, of the sort made familiar by the Republicans, with down and dirty stories about how the new oligarchy is raking off all the money. Because he views Multicultural America as "a grotesque synthesis of New Left and New Right," and because he wants to be even-handed in criticism of both, he has to be as indignant about racial hiring quotas as he is about steady immiseration.

Lind has a relatively easy job making racial preferences look ridiculous as long as he keeps attention focused on O.M.B. [Office of Management and Budget] Statistical Directive 15—a document that he identifies as "part of the secret history of the racial preference revolution" and implausibly claims to be "just as important in modern American life as the Constitution and the Bill of Rights." This was the directive that announced the five-race schema, created the "diversity" industry, and has bedeviled hiring decisions ever since. According to this schema we Americans come in five flavors: American Indian or Alaskan Native; Asian or Pacific Islander; Black; White; and Hispanic. It was this directive that made the Samoan junior executive or the Navajo assistant professor a prize beyond rubies.

But Lind would not have found it so easy to praise color blindness if he had zeroed in on the situation of African-Americans, and had asked himself whether the civil rights movement would have had much lasting effect without preferential hiring for blacks. Many black scholars think that it would not. It is hard to know whether they are right, but Lind's vision of a morally pure movement of the sixties being corrupted in the seventies by leftist ideologues and schematizing bureaucrats seems a bit simplistic. When one remembers that throughout our history every new wave of immigrants, including the Hispanics and Asians, automatically took precedence over, and jobs away from, the descendants of black slaves, it is not clear that affirmative action was as unnecessary as Lind thinks it. Lind has to play down the horror and the bitterness of black-white relations in the United States in order to make color blindness sound as attractive as he does.

Lind may well be right, however, that there is no hope of social and economic equality unless the blue-collar "Reagan Democrats" can be convinced that the enemies of the oligarchy are their friends. He may also be right that the abandonment of racial preferences is the price that liberal politicians will have to pay to regain the allegiance of those blue-collar voters. Most of that price will, as usual, be paid by poor black people rather than politicians or intellectuals. But it may have to be paid nonetheless. It will take a lot of class consciousness to defeat the oligarchy, and Lind makes a good case for saying that we will not get sufficient class consciousness if we continue to insist on racial consciousness. He is certainly right in suggesting that the "politics of identity" has made it a lot more difficult for all of us to get economic inequality in focus.

The best pages of Lind's book are those in which he puts the topic of racial preferences to one side and paints a portrait of the overclass. This portion of *The Next American Nation* is one of the finest sociopolitical jeremiads I have read in years, and I hope that what Lind says there becomes part of our conventional political wisdom. He exposes the Republicans' disparaging use of the term "class warfare" as the propaganda strategy it is—a strategy used by a class whose war on those below has grown steadily more brutal, and whose members are encouraging each other to take pride in being callous.

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Much of what Lind says about growing inequality has been said before, by such authors as Robert Reich, Herbert Gans, and Edward Luttwak. But Lind focuses his polemic more sharply than has anyone else. Here is a sample: "Meanwhile, behind the Potemkin village facade of multi-cultural America, with its five separate-but-equal official races and its decorative racially authentic folk art, the American oligarchy is quietly cannibalizing the remnants of mid-century New Deal America to construct its own enclave society, an America-within-America, linked to the global economy and detached from the destiny of the American middle class."

Lind goes on to say that "In any other democracy, the majority would have coalesced by now in a populist rebellion. In Multicultural America, however, the majority is fragmented while the elite is unified." Even though Lind often rides his hobby-horse—multiculturalism—much too hard, he is certainly right in reiterating what Daniel Bell and others have pointed out: that our attention is being distracted from potentially fatal economic disaster by "culture wars." With economic inequality continually rising, American liberals, instead of constantly shouting economic statistics from the housetops, are expending a huge proportion of their energy on abortion, gays in the military, separation of church and state, and the like.

There is a clean-cut, simple, prejudice-vs.-elementary human decency aspect to many of these so-called "cultural" issues. (Why, one wonders, must our generals—Colin Powell among them—keep on pretending that the knowledge that a certain corporal is homosexual would unnerve an entire infantry company?) Yet this very moral simplicity distracts liberals from more complicated, but ultimately more fateful, questions about immigration policy, medical insurance, GATT, NAFTA, home-mortgage deductions, minimum-wage levels, and the like. The resolution of these issues will determine the outcome of the culture wars as well as of the class war. For if things get bad enough, there *will* be a populist rebellion, led by people who will make Ross Perot look wise and tolerant. Any populist revolt in America will be from the right, and will be made up of people who get their understanding of our social problems from Rush Limbaugh.

I hope that in his next book Lind will get off his hobby-horse and spend less time demonstrating, as he repeatedly and successfully does in this book, that opening up the overclass to token members of racial minorities has served the oligarchy's purposes. I hope that he will spend all his time on income distribution.

A look at the wages offered in the classified columns of your local newspaper will convince you that there is little chance that a pair of high-school graduates working full time (as, for example, security guard and keyboard operator) will *ever* be able to buy a house, much less send their children to college. The disappearance, for the majority of American high school graduates, of the hope of doing either

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of these things coincides with the rise of the overclass. This class—the one to which I, and many of my fellow academics, belong—thinks nothing of buying groceries without checking the ads for sales, ordering new clothes from L. L. Bean whenever the old ones wear out, jumping on airplanes to go on vacation, and checking into Holiday Inns in exotic places. My class is becoming increasingly unable to imagine how the other four-fifths lives. Once this failure of imagination becomes complete, we shall indeed be two nations. Then there will be no American nation worth the name. □

Alan Ryan

THE GLOOMSAYER

NEO-CONSERVATISM, THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN IDEA, by Irving Kristol, The Free Press, 1995. 494 pp. $25.00.

This is an oddly depressing book. The oddity has little to do with its allegiances, more to do with its tone, its view of what is worth writing and thinking about, and its author's conception of the human condition. It is also stunningly boring. Part of the problem, though the smaller part, is that Kristol is a dreadful writer. Kristol says of himself that he abandoned his youthful hopes for a career as a novelist after he wrote a tome in "a style that was a bastard mixture of Saul Bellow and Jean Giraudoux, whose novels I was then enchanted by," and saw soon enough that its destination was the incinerator rather than the best-seller list. He also gave up the idea of writing a book-length "examination of the evolution of American democracy, a kind of sequel to Tocqueville and Henry Adams," when he discovered he had neither the patience nor the intellectual rigor for the task.

Is he, then, a good essayist? On the evidence of these pieces, no. They are lumbering, ungainly, complaining pieces, and it is their complaining quality that explains the atmosphere of gloom and depression that hangs about this hefty volume. On the face of it, you'd expect this to be a cheerful book; Kristol is widely known as "the godfather of neoconservatism," and the vaguely *mafioso* overtones of the label aside, you'd expect him to be flattered, even ready for a little self-congratulation. Not a bit of it. Well, perhaps a very little bit of it, as when he acknowledges in his autobiographical introduction that the support of assorted foundations and think tanks, and the enthusiasm of the *Wall Street Journal*, together with the self-destructive habits of the Democratic party, now mean that conservatives are not so "neo" as they were, but established, entrenched, and on the march.

That aside, complaint predominates. Most of the essays deplore the state of the world, full as it is of sexual license, multicultural education, oppositional intellectuals, revolting students, secular humanists, and welfare mothers. There is a striking absence of sociological curiosity about how it has come about that in a country that is, on Kristol's account of it, overwhelmingly conservative, traditionalist, religious, and patriotic in its inclinations things should have come to such a pass. Such speculation as there is wobbles wildly between incompatible thoughts—when he wishes to extend an olive branch to the liberals, he suggests that the unanticipated consequences of perfectly sensible policies have caught us on the hop, and when he wishes to wage holy war against them, he waves a hand toward the wickedness of countercultural intellectuals. How these persons, who elsewhere are denounced for their isolation from the practicalities of American political life, have managed to remodel American society in their own image he nowhere explains.

Among many other peculiarities of the book is Kristol's observation that his friends are constantly surprised that he is such a *cheerful* conservative. I dare say he is; since he has been supported in some comfort by the well-to-do whose virtues he praises, he has a good deal to be cheerful about. But these essays are anything but cheerful; they vary between the combative and the morose; a cheerful acceptance of anything around him is utterly absent. The conservatism that reckons that "there is a great deal of ruin in a country" and refuses to panic until it is absolutely necessary to do so is not Kristol's. One wonders why. In fact, Kristol supplies much of the answer quite explicitly and a certain amount more by inadvertence.

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The explicit answer is that his chief interest lies in religion rather than politics. His first serious employment was as an editor at *Commentary*, and from those early fifties years he reprints several essays on religion and Jewishness. The sort of religious temper he has is also distinctive. It is, if the phrase is forgivable, Protestant Jewish; God the lawgiver rather than God the source of theological puzzles dominates the scene. This is God as the object of prayer rather than God as the object of cognition. We pray because we are aware of our frailty and our weakness—a good Hobbesian view of the matter—and we know that men behave abominably unless they are subjected to law. One of Kristol's more sympathetic paragraphs is his brief reminiscence of service in the U.S. Army in Germany. His fellow soldiers were ready to loot and rape; they would have shot prisoners of war if military discipline had not stopped them. Even after the full horror of the Holocaust was known, Kristol never changed his mind: Germans were not intrinsically more prone to evil than Americans, for human nature in every setting is essentially fallen. Absent discipline, we all run after evil.

This view doesn't inevitably lead to conservatism; Reinhold Niebuhr was for much of his life a socialist. Bertrand Russell thought that all rational radicals must believe in original sin. Mill didn't believe in God, but was as convinced as Kristol that mankind was deeply imperfect. For some reason, Kristol himself supposes that his religious attachments lead to what he calls a "neo" outlook—so that he was neo-Marxist, neo-Trotskyite, neoliberal, and neoconservative. That suggests a greater taste for intellectual inventiveness than he possesses (or approves of). More plausible is the other insight into his attachments that he offers—that he wants an orthodoxy; the primitive and decayed orthodoxy of the Yeshiva he attended as a child won't do, but something more apt to our late-twentieth-century condition is needed. In short, neoconservatism satisfies his desire for neo-orthodoxy.

Once Kristol's religiosity is given its due, it becomes easier to see why he—and his more intellectually formidable wife for that matter—is so obsessed with "values." The world he sees around him is structured that way. As he himself says, he knows next to no economics, and has spent his life editing other people's work. He candidly admits that even as a Luce Professor of Urban Affairs at New York University, what he valued about the job was the time it gave him to make trouble for the Democrats. What remains impossible to see is why intelligent people with a deep understanding of the cultural and political dilemmas of a society like our own should have thought that Ronald Reagan was a proper object of their devotion. A man who surrounded himself with rip-off artists and ran two administrations as plagued by scandal as any in postwar America seems an odd icon for cultural conservatives who want to bring back discipline and self-control. Kristol runs the standard *Wall Street Journal* line about the slight impact of the Reagan revolution: a Democratic congress imposed deeper cuts than Reagan wanted, and ran amok with its spending programs. It would be an insult to his intelligence to suppose that he actually believes such stuff; it is the small change of political knockabout. Even he must know that the appeal of the Reagan revolution was to the usual mixture of patriotic sentiment and ordinary cupidity. But that makes it even odder that he should take such a high line elsewhere.

Some insight into that puzzle, and some explanation of the muffled note that the whole book seems to strike is offered by Kristol's other profession of allegiance. In Chicago, he encountered Leo Strauss and was bowled over; what he got from Strauss was Strauss's well-known doctrine that the multitude is unfit for philosophical enlightenment, and that intelligent and thoughtful philosophers will be exceedingly cautious in what they allow to get out about their true views. If one adds that distrust of the masses to Kristol's belief in original sin and human political frailty, it becomes a lot easier to see that what Kristol has godfathered is something that must give him pause. It is, as he says in an essay on the exceptionalism of American conservatism, a conservatism unlike English conservatism (the essay is not so much an essay on its avowed subject as a gloomy account of why Michael Oakeshott hasn't wowed Americans). Crucially, American conservatism is populist conservatism. Gin-

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grich really is what American conservatism looks like; you can see that Oakeshott might have thought it something of a joke.

All of which means that in order to do down the multicultural, countercultural, nihilist, high-spending liberals, Kristol has had to hitch his wagon to a conservative revolution driven by the kind of populist impulses that must scare him half to death. Almost equally bad, it has been financed by people for whom he has a barely disguised contempt: commercial and financial types who would not recognize an issue of high principle if it reared up and bit them. Many critics of the neoconservative alliance with the Christian Coalition have pointed to the contrast between the social and cultural liberalism of many neoconservatives—few of whom would wish, for instance, to recriminalize homosexual behavior between consenting adults—and the rip-roaring illiberalism of the fundamentalists. But *Neo-Conservatism* displays a more interesting and deeper tension than that, because the discrepancy between the elitist and paternalist vision of the world that fuels Kristol's conservatism and the anti-elitist, populist sentiments that provide the votes and money that give it so much influence goes right to the heart of his views. □

Stefan Collini

BORDER CROSSING

RAYMOND WILLIAMS, by Fred Inglis. Routledge, 1995. 333 pp. $24.95.

When Raymond Williams died suddenly in 1988, at the age of sixty-six, the tributes were generous and admiring to the point of being fulsome, and he was hailed as, among other things, the greatest socialist thinker of his time in Britain. Yet as obituary piety starts to give way to more measured assessment, even sympathetic critics cannot help compiling long lists of defects, and the basis of his very considerable standing becomes more and more puzzling or at least in need of some fuller explanation. He wrote too much; he often wrote badly; much of what he wrote has been subjected to damning and justified criticism; his political judgment could be poor; and so on and so on. And yet the tributes accumulate: for many he remains a model of what a left intellectual should be, and there is already a considerable body of secondary literature whose very existence testifies to a widespread sense that he is a culturally significant figure whose work repays extended investigation. But it is not easy to account for this standing. What is it about Williams and his work that attracted so much admiration and that continues to underwrite his claim to an important niche in recent intellectual history?

Since part of the answer (to which I shall return) seems to be bound up with the authority conferred by the exceptionally close fit between his personality, his life, and his work, a biography seems likely to throw an unusual amount of light on this question. Fred Inglis's *Raymond Williams* is the first extended account of the life to have appeared, but although it is an affectionate and perceptive portrait, in some ways it does more to deepen than to resolve the puzzle.

In its outward aspect, Williams's life was not particularly unusual or exciting. He was born in 1921, the only child of a railway signalman and his wife. He grew up in a semi-rural working-class community just inside the Welsh border; following the pattern of the clever boy from such a background, he won a scholarship to the local grammar school and then, in 1939, entered Trinity College, Cambridge, to begin a degree in English. Both his studies and a brief membership of the Communist party were interrupted by the war, and he saw active service commanding an armored anti-tank unit in the Normandy invasion and subsequent campaigns. In 1945 he returned to Cambridge to complete his degree, during which period he fell under the spell of F.R. Leavis, and in 1946 began a fifteen-year career as an Adult Education Tutor in English for the Oxford Extra-Mural Delegacy.

The appearance of his first two books in 1950 and 1952 signaled the start of what was to be an exceptionally prolific writing career, but it was the publication of his fourth book in 1958, *Culture and Society*, that brought him widespread recognition. He returned to a teaching post at Cambridge in 1961, where he stayed until his early retirement in 1983; at his death he had pub-

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lished some thirty books, including five novels, and a scarcely credible abundance of journalism and other occasional writing. Among the best known of his widely selling works were *Communications* (1962), *The Country and the City* (1973), *Keywords* (1976), and *Marxism and Literature* (1977). He was intermittently prominent in various left-wing causes, though frequently and increasingly disillusioned with the Labour Party. By the time of his death, he had for some years been emphasizing his distance both from the criticism and teaching of English literature as conventionally understood, and from the chief institutional expressions of British politics and culture. In opposition to "English" and to England, two determining preoccupations of his earlier career, he now described himself as a "cultural materialist" and a "Welsh European."

Inglis's book is much less of a conventional biography than it first appears. He has not pursued archival material and correspondence to any great extent; large expanses of the prose are unfootnoted; much of the writing is by turns personal, lyrical, and evocative; and large slabs of quotation are taken, oral-history fashion, from the transcripts of interviews or letters to Inglis from people who knew Williams in various capacities. The book is above all an evocation—an evocation of a man Inglis knew (not well) and admired (a lot), but also an evocation of a world, a milieu, a mood. Inglis is responsive to the loyalties and commitments informing Williams's work, rather less good as an analyst of their theoretical ambitions and shortcomings (while his brief discussions of the ideas of the likes of Wittgenstein and Kant almost seem designed to undermine the reader's confidence in his authority). But the book is distinguished above all by Inglis's writerly energy, here essaying a novelistic sketch, there interjecting a remembered vignette; it is a prose not afraid of trying the high leap and pirouette (not always quite landing on its feet), while at the same time willing to let a demotic gruffness do the work of moral commentary.

The book, it will be clear, has its faults, but it is never boring, and that is a remarkable achievement given Williams's capacity to be a relentlessly boring writer and, it would seem, in some ways a boring man. And by the end its faults come to seem a necessary and not always unreasonable price to pay for some marvelous cadenzas on unlikely themes—on the culture of the railway signal-box, or on the finger-numbing chill in the bleak, drafty halls in which adult education classes took place immediately after 1945, or on the "espresso-and-existentialism" atmosphere of the early New Left. By turns, this biography metamorphoses into a prose poem to English socialism's best self, an anguished keening for the intellectual left's idealized lost leader, and a meditation on solidarity and its discontents. Other biographers are already at work, and no doubt there will be more thorough, more scholarly, and in some ways more usable lives to come. But it is hard to imagine that any of these future studies will contain as many passages of inspired, moving portraiture as this one does. Inglis's writing asks for, and needs, the reader's indulgence: once one gets out of sorts with it, a catalogue of failings will irresistibly start to compile itself. But grant it its own tune, and it will carry you along with rare buoyancy.

It is part of Inglis's achievement that this por-

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trait of a man he greatly admired and wanted to like leaves even the sympathetic reader with a strong sense of the ways in which Williams was neither wholly admirable nor easily likeable. It is, as perhaps the life of any prolific author must be, a portrait of egotism, of the ceaseless, all-subordinating egotism of the writer who gives priority to turning out his daily quota of words. This was the telos around which domestic life was arranged, around which his marriage shaped itself, and around which he neglected his students, was only half-available for his friends, kept his distance from the world. (There is much evidence in this book of what an unresponsive companion Williams could be—his star pupil Terry Eagleton speaks of his "clenched withdrawal.") And to a quite extraordinary extent his writing depended not on receiving and re-arranging impressions from outside himself, whether in the form of books, people, or the public world, but on reaching inside himself, and drawing up, as from some inexhaustible but little-varying well, the convictions that he elaborated, restated, and then restated again, undeterred by criticism ("several people report occasions on which he simply didn't read or didn't heed central objections made to some part of his work"). He wrote his immensely influential little book on analyzing the popular media, *Communications*, without owning a television; he was a professor of drama who practically never went to the theater; he was an organizer of the left who could rarely be reached by telephone; he was the great evangelist for the values of "community" who unflinchingly ignored all claims that might interfere with his solitude—the solitude necessary for the daily indulgence of his habit, his private vice, his only partly socialized addiction to the typewriter.

Yet the sense of purpose this suggests, that centered conviction about who he was and about (in the title phrase of a collection of his essays) "what I came to say," is one clue to his remarkable impact. In person as well as on the page he clearly gave off a strong sense of wholeness, of someone whose beliefs and experiences and ambitions were all of a piece. This, rather than any claim based on his expertise or his research or even the acuteness of his analysis of the contemporary scene, was the basis of his authority. And it was essentially a kind of *moral* authority, expressed in serious, unshowy prose, an authority that came from the sense that he had connected, re-connected, a given topic to the great verities of human need and social relationship. Often, there is not much "information" in his writing, not much close analysis of other people's work, not a carefully elaborated conceptual scheme: there is just that determined, massively confident, assertion that he spoke out of a grounded, elemental hold on the imperatives of the ethical enterprise of collective living.

His own working-class background was the professional diploma that licensed him to practise this peculiar trade, and Williams was not slow to display his credentials in this respect. He made much of being the son of a railway worker (characteristically, the pre-feminist Williams—and he remained unreconstructedly pre-feminist to the end—presented himself as having only one relevant parent); his fiction and a good deal of his cultural criticism revolve around the clash between the human values embodied in working-class family life and the pretensions and coldnesses that disfigure social relations in the worlds in which the successful scholarship boy later finds himself. The tendentiousness evident in this contrast seems the more culpable when we learn from Inglis of the tensions that dominated the actual Williams home. (It is interesting to note in passing how unlike the traditional two-parent-and-several-children model of the warm, expressive working-class home were the family situations of both Williams and Richard Hoggart, the two most notable spokesmen for working-class culture in their generation: the orphaned Hoggart grew up in an almost entirely female household of grandmother and aunts, while the only child Williams observed from an early age the distance between his increasingly silent parents.)

In trying to understand Williams's impact, it is partly true, but partly too easy, to say that the timing was right. Certainly, the question of "authentic" working-class voices acquired a sudden prominence in metropolitan literary and intellectual circles in the late fifties in Britain; certainly the early sixties was *the* time to be a

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rising star of the intellectual left; certainly, the sixties and seventies created a hugely expanded audience in higher education for anyone able to address "academic" issues in an accessible way. There were several figures who benefited from one or more of these developments, but practically no one other than Williams who turned their conjunction into the preconditions for sustained intellectual celebrity. Hoggart was his nearest rival in the late fifties and early sixties, E.P. Thompson in the sixties and seventies (and into the eighties as an anti-nuclear campaigner), perhaps Stuart Hall in the late seventies and eighties, and of these only Thompson comes close to sharing Williams's stature as a socialist theorist (or, in his case, anti-theorist).

Exposure and celebrity—the dynamics of what the advertisers call "brand recognition"—are a vital part of the mechanism by which intellectuals, including left intellectuals (who tend to disdain such matters), come to perform their distinctive role. If, after the great success of *Culture and Society* in 1958, Williams had then fallen silent while devoting six or eight years to the research for his next book, this biography would most probably not have been written. The kind of turning point represented by that book's success can be crudely indicated by the following figures from the bibliography of Williams's work prepared by Alan O'Connor (*Raymond Williams: Writing, Culture, Politics* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1989]). In 1955 he published one review essay, in 1956 one article and two pieces in the adult education house journal, in 1957 one article and three reviews. But in 1959 alone he published seventeen essays and reviews of various kinds; in the same year he also published a further six reviews in the *Guardian*, followed by fifteen for the paper the next year and almost three hundred in total during the rest of his career. O'Connor's extraordinary bibliography also reveals that Williams published ninety-one chapters, introductions, and similar contributions to books; *all* of them date from after the publication of *Culture and Society*. And the listings of his other categories of publication tell much the same story.

As with so many successful publicists, the sheer quantity of his writing was important. As Inglis reports, he practically never turned down a commission or a request. As a result, he frequently repeated himself, he published a good deal of slack, substandard writing, he gave hostages with a lavish generosity. Inglis again has to shake his head sadly: "He wrote too much, the colossal discipline wasn't worth all of it." But it was all part of the mechanism of reputation, all part of becoming "Raymond Williams." After a certain point, his opinions were printed because he had become the sort of person whose opinions were printed.

This is not to suggest that it is of no account what those opinions were or how persuasively they helped make sense of parts of his readers' experience. And this relates to the question of range. If the intellectual is "the specialist in the general," then there can be no staying within the narrow confines of expertise. Part of Williams's appeal lay in the way in which he calmly disregarded the border guards who patrol the boundaries between disciplines and, still more, between academic endeavor and political and social activism. His writing, at whatever level of theoretical sophistication, embodied the conviction that literature, politics, society, the media, everyday life were all part of a connected and mutually determining whole whose elements we were bound to distort if we studied them in isolation from each other. But in his occasional pieces, in particular, he perhaps too often confined himself to asserting this truth in a programmatic way. He handled these abstractions with the decisiveness of a grandmaster moving the pieces in a simultaneous exhibition, yet curiously, given his endlessly reiterated use of terms like "concrete" and "particular," it could sometimes seem as though his very familiarity with the terms had worn them smooth, so that they no longer snagged any actual detail of experience.

Williams's career also raises interesting questions about the tensions between reaching local and international audiences. *Culture and Society* is now venerated as one of the founding texts of the cultural studies movement, though its frame of reference, informing perspective, and initial impact were all highly, almost aggressively, local. More generally, and especially in the United States, Williams's name is associated

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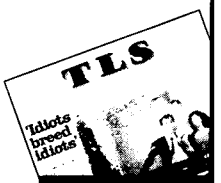

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above all with "cultural materialism," though very few of his books were explicitly written under the aegis of that late-formulated label.

In practice, his international reputation only took off once he began to engage with the work of the leading Western Marxist theorists in the early seventies. Inglis sadly remarks "a certain unthinkingness in some of his theoretic labours in the 1970s," and flatly describes *Marxism and Literature*, now probably his most widely known work, as "his unreadable book," though there can be no doubt that "cultural materialism" was the strike force that earned Williams a place at the negotiating table of international high theorists. Yet by inclination and talent he was not primarily a theorist, and in some deep ways he always remained parochial rather than international in his outlook: perhaps no one whose intellectual life had been born under the star of Leavis could ever shake off that obsessively local focus (consider by contrast how widely and naturally international someone like, say, Hobsbawm has been).

Inglis's book may well strike some non-British readers as too readily collusive with that parochialism, too little appreciative of what Williams, like any theorist, has to say to those who grew up in utterly different national circumstances. But the emphasis and inwardness seem to me right and illuminating. Inglis makes no pretense at writing like a visiting anthropologist: this is his own tribe, and he understands, loves, and is exasperated by the same sentiments and rituals that bore Williams's career along. There are many vantage points from which much of Williams's writing is now in danger of seeming overblown and overrated, but part of the achievement of Inglis's unusual, flawed, and impressive book is to make us understand, make us feel, that if one were struggling to give expression to one's socialist convictions by teaching the imaginatively liberating power of literature to children in a state school within the still deeply class-structured society of 1960s Britain, then Williams's writings would fall as Scripture, manna, and textbook rolled into one.

And the book helps us generalize this particular, informing case, and thus to come closer to understanding how Williams did something for hundreds of thousands of readers. Having quoted an autobiographical tribute by Eagleton, Inglis glosses:

> That's what he [Williams] most characteristically did: he broke with the established, calmly superior assumptions and way of talking in England, but did so with a manner, an idiom and diction themselves so unassailably assured that those on the wrong side of the break couldn't see how to stop him. And then, into the space made by the break, he dropped his own calm commonplaces about human connection, about solidarity and equality, about those things we had been most fired by as young idealists, and that he—and Leavis before him, in his queer, fierce, intimidating, contradictory way—had best given voice to as an academic, as an educational project.

Elsewhere, more simply, he praises him for "keeping alive a speakable moral idiom of the old Left."

Inglis brings out well just how seriously Williams took the task of addressing a wide readership, and just how much journalism and occasional writing he did. Although in his books Williams, it has to be said, could be an excep-

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tionally dreary writer, "conjuring weight out of abstraction" as Eagleton accurately and unkindly put it, he could be, and often was, a notably effective journalist and reviewer—direct, engaged, instructive. And the mark of his most successful writing in this vein, as of comparable figures one might think of, was that he didn't patronize his readers. His contract with them was to explain as clearly and persuasively as he could what he thought mattered about a given issue or book. He wrote as though there were readers who wanted to be made to think harder than usual. And as a result, there were.

For all the misgivings one may have about both his writing and his ideas, there is no doubt that Williams had—to use one of the cant words of our time, though not his—an "enabling" effect on hundreds of thousands of readers. This owed something to the circumstances of Britain from the late fifties to the early seventies, certainly, but it also reflected his willingness to try to connect the more austere realms of intellectual inquiry to the often puzzling realities of thoughtful people's everyday lives. However well or badly we now judge that Williams carried out this task, his life is a reminder of the need for those who can put recent events or new books in a wider historical and intellectual context, or coin phrases that disturb or corrode unreflectively held assumptions, or give people tools to think with, or—above all—just write in a serious, engaged but analytical way about things that are either treated superficially elsewhere or not treated at all.

Williams first became a father when he was twenty-three, and he went on to become a father figure to many on the left with no less precocity. Reading the literature about Williams, written before as well as since his death, one has to recognize that he had many admirers who *wanted* to idealize him, wanted to overlook the failings, because they wanted there to be in the world a stirring example of that cherished category, the "general intellectual of the Left." Williams represented a possibility, a space that many people felt needed to be kept open—a space for the figure who combines academic standing with passionate commitment, who is a leading theorist but also easily accessible, who has reshaped scholarly fields but is far from being a specialist, and who, above all, experiences no inhibiting tension between his intellectual projects and his human needs, between his "work" and his "life." This remains a seductive and perhaps necessary ideal, and perhaps Raymond Williams came as close as anyone in recent years to embodying it. □

John Eatwell

LABOUR'S ECONOMICS

THE STATE WE'RE IN, by Will Hutton. Jonathan Cape, 1995. 352 pp. £6.99.

Books on economic affairs don't sell well in Britain. I should know. In 1982 I presented an eight-part television series for the BBC entitled *Whatever Happened to Britain?* There was a book of the show, and every evening that the program was broadcast (the series was repeated three times in three years) the BBC urged viewers to go out and buy the book. Nearly five million people watched the program. Only about twenty-six thousand bought the book. Yet in one year, without the benefit of free television advertising, Will Hutton's *The State We're In* has sold a hundred thousand copies, and at this writing (January 1996) it is at the top of the paperback best-seller lists.

Why has Hutton's book done so well? First, it's a brilliant book (far better than mine), a remarkable synthesis of insights into contemporary British economics and politics written with stylish verve and not a little passion. Second, the book has caught the mood of the times. Hutton has captured the atmosphere of social disintegration and economic decline that pervades Tory Britain. Third, with the Labour party sustaining opinion poll leads of thirty points or so, people are eager to know what a new Labour government might do, and Hutton's book has undoubtedly had a significant impact on Labour thinking. Fourth, and this is cause for some optimism, the reception for Hutton's book suggests a growing constituency for real change in Britain. The sheer bravado of Hutton's sweeping analysis has captured the imagination and fueled the hopes of many members of that constituency.

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This book is very much about Britain, but it has a far wider significance for American readers. Like the United Kingdom, the United States is suffering from increasing social disintegration, increasing inequality, and real poverty and malnutrition on a scale that no one ever expected to see again. Both nations seem unable to recapture the economic dynamism and secure employment that characterized the first twenty-five years of the postwar era. And as the United States today faces Newt Gingrich's version of virulent right-wing Toryism, the lessons of the damage done to Britain by the governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major make salutary reading. Finally, as Hutton makes clear, there is an important international dimension to Britain's economic problems that is shared by the United States and, indeed, by all major industrial countries.

Hutton's analysis of the economic weakness of Britain is not particularly new. His argument that British capitalism has been deformed by the persistent obeisance of economic policy to the interests of the financial sector was anticipated in Andrew Shonfield's brilliant 1965 study, *Modern Capitalism*. Like Shonfield, Hutton argues that "successful capitalism needs careful economic management and institutions which foster cooperation and commitment." Britain's institutions have always been biased toward a finance-driven free market. Even in the postwar heyday of Keynesian macroeconomic management, that bias was always present. Nationalization in Britain focused on declining industries and public utilities. The state was never an effective agent for industrial modernization as was the state in France. Keynesian macroeconomics was never buttressed by the industrial strategies sustained by committed financial institutions as in France or Germany, or even by a government department so committed to maintaining national competitiveness in cutting-edge industries as is the U.S. Defense Department.

Most important of all, argues Hutton, British social democracy was never secured by the constitutional reform necessary to replace the country's "semi-modern" state. British democracy suffers from the elected dictatorship of the party with a House of Commons majority; a constitution that, being "unwritten," can be amended and reinterpreted at will by the government of the day; and from the social and institutional power that the class system confers on a self-perpetuating elite. Labour governments implicitly accepted this model, never attempting to diffuse either political or economic power. The trade union movement's role was to oppose the depredations of capitalism, not to take part in the development of more consensual, participatory economic institutions. So by 1979, argues Hutton, "The shortcomings of Britain's constitutional arrangements derailed the attempt at establishing a Keynesian social democracy and divided the Labour Party. . . . All the majesty of Conservative hegemony in the unreformed state was deployed to increase the role of markets, disengage the state and fight for price stability."

This identification of the relationship between Britain's constitution and British economic failure is the distinctive element in Hutton's argument. The priorities of the financial sector dominate economic activity. Those priorities are liquidity and high and secure dividends, reinforced by an active takeover market that disciplines managements who might wish to pursue other priorities—long-term investment and growth, for example. These pressures not only force management to pledge ever greater proportions of profits to dividends, but also militate against a constructive partnership between management and labor. Labor costs and the firm's assets must be continually squeezed to satisfy the ever-pressing demand for dividends. U.K. dividend ratios are twice those in the United States. In the 1980s, the world's top two hundred companies spent three times as much on research and development as they did on dividends, but in Britain dividends were 50 percent *higher* than R&D investment. "Liquidity has become a fetish and attempts to counter this desire for instant gratification have become minimal . . . . There is a permanent bias in the British system to lack of commitment—and from this all else flows," says Hutton.

Lack of long-term commitment, the absence of dialogue or the search for consensus, define both the political and the economic culture of Britain. "British notions of sovereign and autonomous action for shareholders as much as for workers are borrowed from the Westminster

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model of the state. . . . Dialogue and participation are not the British way at the level of the state and trying to encourage them at company level without any buttressing structures or cultural support is doomed to failure." Consistent as this individualistic culture may be with the institutions of the idealized free market, it stands in sharp contrast to the organization of state and economy in Germany. The mutual commitment of finance and industry (there have been *four* contested takeovers in Germany since 1945) and the search for consensus in labor relations is mirrored in the German political system by the dispersion of power thoughout the federal state. Japan's financial system is similarly committed to providing long-term support to industry, a commitment reflected in industry's long-term relationship with its labor force. Even in the United States, the prominence of local financial institutions tends to sustain a mutual interest between local industry and local finance, something totally lacking in Britain.

The reinforcement of the short-term market culture by Margaret Thatcher's economic reforms has had a devastating effect on British industry. Even during the convulsions of the 1970s, investment by British manufacturing industry amounted to 2 percent of the value of output. Since 1979, investment has been running at 0.6 percent of the value of output. And, not surprisingly, the growth of manufacturing has been the slowest among the major industrial countries. This in turn has led to growing unemployment—despite more than twenty revisions to the official method of calculating unemployment statistics (all of which reduced the count), average unemployment has more than doubled. The Conservative response has been to appeal to the power of the market by reducing benefits and workers' rights. Inequality has increased sharply as the poor have become significantly poorer and the rich have enjoyed tax cuts and higher dividends. This has been justified by the argument that equity and efficiency are incompatible, and that the incentives of inequality are necessary to elicit effort.

The British experience confirms empirical evidence from around the world. Inequality is *in*efficient. High profits and dividends, far from stimulating investment, have been associated with the lowest investment rate since the war. The increased inequality of incomes and growth of temporary unemployment have led to greater ill-health, lower investment in the development of skills, more crime, and a growing malaise of social division and insecurity.

The U.S. experience is often cited in support of the policy of inequality. The United States has enjoyed a low unemployment rate compared to that of many European countries with high benefits and strong workers' rights. It is certainly true that if there are no unemployment benefits there will be virtually no unemployment. People are forced to scrape by somehow, by taking very low-productivity, low-paid work. (The measured unemployment rate in Mexico is one of the lowest in the OECD.) This phenomenon is almost entirely absent in Germany, where very low-productivity casual employment is extremely rare.

As might be expected from the structure of his argument, Hutton praises the achievements of the German and Japanese economies, and suggests that their "stakeholder" approach to economic relationships (a system that recognizes the "stake" that consumers, workers, owners, and the community have in corporate action) is likely to prove more productive, and indeed more competitive in the medium term. The problem with this argument is that the financial systems of major industrial economies are today far less autonomous than they have ever been before. Financial liberalization is spreading the pressures for liquidity and for substantial returns. In the United States this has led to the collapse of the Glass-Steagall rules,* which limited market pressures on medium term investment. British short-termism is becoming an American phenomenon too. In Germany and Japan the banking systems are under considerable pressure to emulate their Anglo-Saxon competitors, and are now experiencing the instability that has been a feature of financial markets over the past decade.

This raises an important question: if a committed, long-termist, stakeholder capitalism is more efficient, why is there a tendency for it to

* Legislation passed in the 1930s that prevented banks from engaging in business ventures.

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break down when exposed to the rigors of the international capital market? The answer lies in the very notion of commitment. If most financial institutions are willing to invest long-term, then any one investor who seeks to acquire an advantage by switching funds from one company to another in the search for short-term gain will indeed profit from the exercise, and so will gain a competitive edge *so long as other investors do not change their strategy*. But if all investors switch to the short-term, then the performance of the economy as a whole will deteriorate. The same is true of an economy in which companies are committed to investing in the skills of their workers. If one company fails to invest and poaches skilled workers from others, it will thrive. But if all fail to invest then all will suffer.

That is why the intervention of the state is necessary for successful capitalist growth. It was not just the opening of markets, but the structuring of market and financial relationships that provided the vital support for accumulation in nineteenth-century Germany and twentieth-century Japan and South Korea. The intervention of the state was, in each case, motivated by an economic and political crisis, typically in the form of a perception of backwardness and failure. The Second World War provided a massive sense of failure to the entire economic and political infrastructure of the West. The defense of the nation required a mobilization of economic resources that the market was obviously incapable of performing. The resultant regulated capitalism survived the war in various forms: in the Bretton Woods structure of controls that permitted countries to pursue national economic goals relatively free from the fear of international financial crises, in national systems of financial mobilization that overcame the inherent short-termism of financial markets, in welfare states that solidified the identity of the working class with national goals. All these, in varying forms, provided the infrastructure of the postwar Golden Age, in which all the major industrial countries sustained full employment and grew faster than they have at any time before or since.

The Golden Age was undermined from within. Even before the oil price shock, the relative decline of the United States, together with the progressive liberalization of international finance, had weakened the stable postwar framework. The collapse of the fixed-exchange rate Bretton Woods system was the final straw. Regulatory structures that inhibited flows of capital were challenged as "inefficient" and "against the national interest," and the infrastructure of speculation was constructed. The Bretton Woods system was finally abandoned in 1973. The United States announced the elimination of all capital controls in January 1974.

The incentive to deregulate international capital flows, which was created by the abandonment of fixed rates, was decisively reinforced by the need to hedge against the costs that fluctuating exchange rates imposed upon the private sector. Under the Bretton Woods system this risk was borne by the public sector. With that system's collapse, foreign exchange risk was privatized. Exchange controls were abolished. Domestic restrictions on cross-market access for financial institutions were scrapped. Controls on the growth of credit were eliminated, and monetary policy was now conducted predominantly through management of short-term interest rates. A global market in monetary instruments was created.

The degree to which individual countries have responded to the financial pressures to deregulate, and the industrial pressures that follow close behind, depends upon their particular circumstances, institutions and history. Britain is clearly peculiarly susceptible to the lure of financial short-termism. But the same pressures build everywhere as particular firms or countries break ranks and seek to enjoy the short-term advantage of breaking the rules of the game.

So perhaps Hutton's emphasis on the peculiar character of the British state is overstated. For if this international extension of Hutton's argument is correct, then the divisive, destabilizing pressures of unregulated markets, in which the short-term demands of finance dictate terms to industry, will continue to depress all the major industrial economies—until such time as a political revolt again forces the na-

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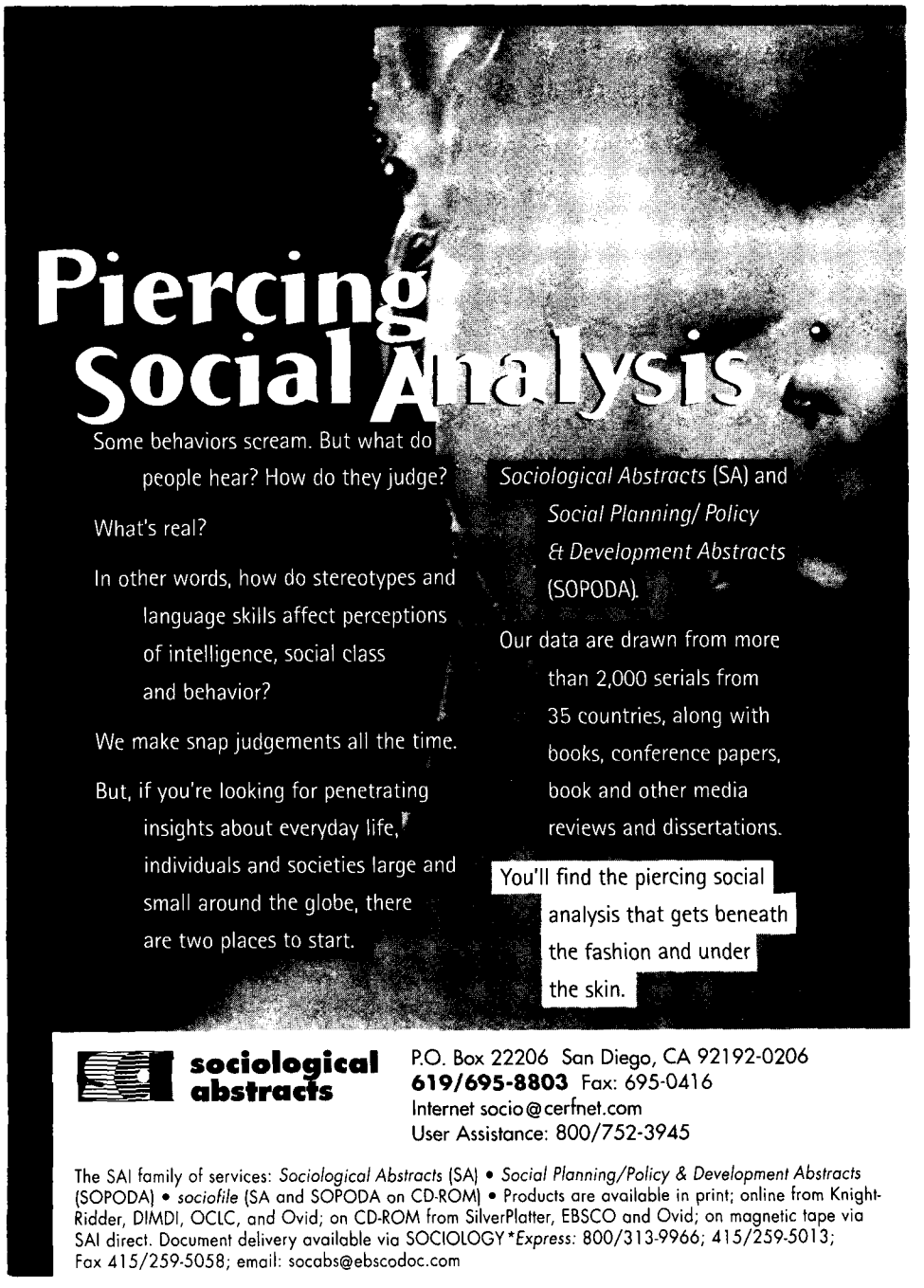
tion-state, or states, to intervene once again to create a stable long-term financial framework. It is difficult today to imagine the creation of such a framework in one country. It is equally difficult to imagine the achievement of the necessary degree of international cooperation, other than under the most extreme circumstances. It is not a happy prospect.

Despite its emphasis on the British case, Will Hutton's argument has far wider significance, and deserves a far wider audience. He should be persuaded to find an American co-author to produce a similarly incisive work entitled, perhaps, *The State America's In*. □



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Different Boats, Same Problems

Editors:

Nicolaus Mills (Affirmative Action Symposium, Fall 1995) is correct to point out that "[t]he left needs to acknowledge all that affirmative action cannot do..." and that "liberals [should] worry more about...undoing [the past] altogether [rather than compensating for it]." Affirmative action, we must admit, was meant to redress the effects of past discrimination, and was supposed to be temporary. Ideally, once affirmative action programs were successful, they could be phased out. Indeed, they *should* be phased out. They were not meant to be a permanent fixture in the social landscape.

However, at this time, we still need some form of remedial program. Mills would exclude immigrants who have come in the last twenty years from affirmative action programs. "If it is to be meaningful—and sacrificed for—affirmative action cannot be defined so broadly as to be nothing more than a permanent minority entitlement."

His suggestion assumes that a different kind of racism affects recent immigrants. I question this. Although overt racism is frowned upon today, nepotism, institutional and unconscious racism and discrimination, deliberate racial steering in the housing market, discrimination in lending, and race-based presumption of qualification (or lack thereof) are all present. Although *de jure* segregation has been eliminated, segregated schools and public facilities have been declared unconstitutional, and affirmative action goals have been pursued, *de facto* segregation remains intense in public schools across the country, African-Americans remain hypersegregated residentially, "minority" contractors are still under-awarded contracts, and managerial and executive positions remain largely in the hands of white men. Inequalities of access and of opportunity still exist.

The impact of these inequities is no different for recent immigrants of color. Absent affirmative action, for example, they will still face a residentially segregated housing market. They are not given special consideration in the awarding of contracts; nor are they perceived as any more qualified for access to the boardroom. Although they do not share the same history as the "African-American who can trace her ancestry and victimization back to the seventeenth century," they do inherit some of those burdens and they must battle the same inequities.

Immigrants of color come to a society that distinguishes between black and white, with no gradations of color or ethnicity in between. They lose their ethnic identity and are given only a racial identity. Thus, they are often perceived as "native" African-Americans, with all the negative racial implications attached to that identity. If we were to develop an affirmative action-type program for recent immigrants based on the inequities that they face, we would end up with a program very similar to those that exist for "native" African-Americans. Why? Not because we have allowed affirmative action to "take on burdens it cannot bear," but because the legacy and impact of racism and discrimination are consistent and persistent.

Affirmative action programs, or rather the need for their continued existence in some form, are disturbing and painful reminders that we have not achieved the racial equality—much less the racial harmony—we wish we had.

PAUL E. BUTLER
New York, N. Y.

Nicolaus Mills Replies:

Affirmative action with its group preferences is designed to make up for historic wrongs—especially in education—that civil rights law alone cannot remedy. Paul Butler, in his concern for discrimination against immigrants, conflates affirmative action compensations with civil rights protection. That's a disservice to everyone, and in these conservative times, a fatal political strategy. □

Quotes Out of Context

Editors:

In his defense of political correctness, Todd Gitlin ("The Demonization of Political Correctness," Fall 1995) further distorts by misquotation my half-sentence about Shakespeare and Alice Walker that Gerald Graff earlier wrenched out of context. (The reference was to the number of English courses in which each was taught, not the number of departments. Anyone who cares about accuracy in polemics can find the original piece in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 13, 1988.) The larger point, however, is that Gitlin accepts Graff's supposed refutation: Shakespeare was taught far more often than Walker at Northwestern, therefore the canon thrives.

I find it astonishing and deeply revealing that, at least for purposes of this controversy, people on the left consider Northwestern and similar schools to be the norm in American higher education. Hasn't anyone ever told them that most students attend public institutions where the English department teaches little besides composition, and that *The Color Purple* was a huge favorite among composition instructors in 1988?

Gitlin, who was a sociologist at a public university (albeit Berkeley), should know better. He should also not downplay the fact that the most telling academic opposi-

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tion to political correctness has come not from the right, which can be dismissed with a sneer at Northwestern or Berkeley, but from liberals of one kind or another such as David Bromwich, C. Vann Woodward, James Coleman, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and John Searle. How clever of him to place such thinkers with himself in a comfortable position that is ostensibly neither here nor there. If he conceded that they strongly oppose the phenomena he is defending, the premises of his argument would require him to stigmatize them as conservatives. Turning liberals into conservatives has, depressingly, been the chief accomplishment of academic radicalism since the end of the Vietnam War.

CHRISTOPHER CLAUSEN
State College, Pa.

Todd Gitlin Replies:

My error (Professor Clausen did indeed write "courses," not "departments") was both innocent and innocuous. I leave it to readers to evaluate Professor Clausen's own error, this one of omission: he fails to mention that I cited from Professor Graff not only the Northwestern curriculum but national surveys of what is taught in English courses at various universities, showing that revisionism is kept at bay. (Graff writes, for example, that among required readings in nineteenth-century literature, the noncanonical author most frequently added—in 15 percent of the cases—was Harriet Beecher Stowe. Not a bad idea, as far as that goes.) As for what is taught and not taught in English composition, I would far sooner see students study Shakespeare than Walker in school, but if reading Walker helps them learn to write grammatical sentences, let them read Walker. □

D'Souza Maligned

Editors:

What was Eric Foner trying to accomplish in his review (Winter 1996) of Dinesh D'Souza's book *The End of Racism*? If he hoped to dissuade people from reading it by describing the book as absurd and bigoted, he probably succeeded. But if his purpose was a reasoned demonstration of the book's flaws, his mode of attack made success impossible. He frequently and substantially misrepresents what the book says. No one—not even distinguished professors of history—can refute assertions that may be reasonable by changing them into assertions that are not.

According to Foner, D'Souza claims that discrimination based on a belief in biological inferiority has disappeared. An absurd claim, but not D'Souza's! He presents the end of racist discrimination as a desirable and attainable goal, not an accomplished fact. The book does assert that racism in this country has "declined" and that it is not "the main problem facing blacks today."

According to the *review*, D'Souza describes racism as nothing more than an opinion. Not so. The *book* defines racism to include both the belief that racial differences in intellectual and moral capacity are innate, and the will to discriminate accordingly.

The *review*: D'Souza fails to understand that racism arose not simply to explain difference but to justify conquest, colonization, enslavement, and economic domination. The *book*: "[T]he ideology of racial superiority, which originated to explain civilizational differences, became consolidated in America as a convenient rationalization for continuing oppression."

The *review*: according to D'Souza, all one needs to know about Aztecs is that they practiced human sacrifice. The *book*: "[T]he Maya, Inca and Aztec civilizations were impressive for their sophisticated knowledge of the seasons and stars, an advanced calendar, elaborate techniques of weaving and ornamentation, and architectural brilliance...."

The *review*: D'Souza believes that American children should study other cultures, but only as horrible examples of barbarism and injustice. The *book*: "Schools and colleges should provide...an authentic multicultural curriculum that...would expose students to 'the best that has been thought and said' not simply in the West but in other cultures as well."

The *review*: D'Souza makes the outrageous assertion that blacks owe American society a debt of gratitude for slavery. The *book*: no debt is mentioned, but the claim is made that out of evil has arisen some good. The famous black educator Booker T. Washington is quoted as declaring, "Notwithstanding the cruelty and moral wrong of slavery, we are in a stronger and more hopeful condition, materially, intellectually, morally and religiously, than is true of an equal number of black people in any other portion of the globe." Summarizing this and similar statements, D'Souza writes that "Washington's argument...is that slavery...brought Africans into the orbit of modern civilization and Western freedom...." D'Souza's own view is that "slavery was an institution that was terrible to endure for slaves, but it left the *descendants* of slaves better off" than their kinsmen in Africa (emphasis in original).

The list of misrepresentations could go on. Were they deliberate or the unwitting products of haste and bias? How many instances of misrepresentation must a review contain to make it unacceptable for publication in *Dissent*?

CURTIS CRAWFORD
Charlottesville, Va.

Eric Foner Replies:

Curtis Crawford's letter misrepresents both Dinesh D'Souza's book and my review. Part of the problem lies with D'Souza himself, whose arguments, as I wrote, are frequently incoherent and self-contradictory. Nonetheless, Crawford fails to demonstrate that my review was unfair or misleading.

Let me respond to just a few of his points. D'Souza's entire argument rests on his distinction between traditional racism, based on belief in the biological inferiority of blacks, which he claims has been "marginalized in American society," and discrimination today, which he calls "a rational response to black group traits" such as, according to his account, criminality, laziness, and generally deficient "civilization." He may praise the Maya and Aztecs for their

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achievements, but his account of world history and how it should be taught is based on what he calls "Western cultural superiority."

It does not matter whether Booker T. Washington or Dinesh D'Souza originated the claim that slavery brought blacks into the orbit of "Western freedom" and left the descendants of slaves better off than those who remained in Africa. The statement is not only historically meaningless (since it ignores the dire effect of centuries of the Atlantic slave trade on African society) but morally outrageous. This is like claiming that Jews benefited from the Holocaust because it contributed to the creation of the state of Israel. □

What Gays Found at the Movies

Editors:

David L. Kirp's "How Gays Lost It at the Movies" (Winter 1996) brings to mind not only vivid memories of the protests in the gay community that greeted William Friedkin's pre-AIDS-crisis movie *Cruising* by many who viewed it as exploitative and antigay, but the more recent complaints that even when Hollywood does produce progay films (*Philadelphia*; *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*) it manages to water gay life down into "fluff" and something "unthreateningly make-believe," to use Kirp's words.

Was *Cruising* "deeply homophobic at the conceptual level" (gay film critic Vito Russo in the 1987 edition of his book *The Celluloid Closet*) or "one of the most candid films ever made about gay America" (Kirp)? Was *Philadelphia* a sentimental effort "to efface the controversial" aspects of gay sex practices (Kirp) or a sympathetic portrayal of a gay man trying to assert his dignity in the face of an employer's homophobic reaction to AIDS?

Can questions like these be answered definitively? As a gay writer who has interviewed dozens of lesbians and gay men on dozens of topics over the years, I have come to doubt they can. There are as many gay lifestyles as there are gay people, and probably just as many opinions among the gay population on what is or is not acceptable about gay lives for movie makers to portray. And as Kirp's anecdote about the recent screening of *Cruising* in San Francisco without gay protest indicates, those opinions often change with time.

Kirp's comments miss two very important points about what he calls the "ever-shifting and ever-contested terrain of gay self-identity" as it relates to the movies. The first is that over the last two or three decades lesbians and gay men have created a space in which to define themselves even within the constrictions of Hollywood sensibilities. The gay-friendly attitude shown in Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia* would have been inconceivable without the protests many gay people voiced about the homosexual psychopathic killer Demme depicted in *Silence of the Lambs*. Likewise, no openly gay screenwriter like Douglas Carter Beane would have been allowed to produce the script for *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* without considerable changes in Hollywood attitudes in recent years, and I doubt those changes came about because the Hollywood Heterosexual Caucus voted one Tuesday evening in favor of greater gay sensitivity.

The second point the article overlooks is the highly viable gay cinema gay people have created for themselves outside of Hollywood in the last ten to fifteen years. Among the films that spring to mind are *The Law of Desire, Dona Herlinda and Her Son, Desert Hearts, Okoge, For a Lost Soldier, My Beautiful Laundrette, Zero Patience, The Incredibly True Adventures of 2 Girls in Love, Grief, Go Fish*, and the films of Derek Jarman.

At the end of his article Kirp asks, "But what about all the untold tales, accounts of gay lives less perfect than the hero of *Philadelphia*, less hilarious than the drag queens in *Wong Foo*?" They can be found in all the independent films produced by lesbian and gay filmmakers the world over. He also comments: "Amid all the gay fluff on the screen, there's no way to detect the political threat, so much more menacing now than during the era of *Cruising*. . . . Where is the wake-up call, the art that challenges consciousness, the *Cruising* for our times?" That art has already arrived—and in a form so mature some people may not recognize its existence. What is Jarman's erotically charged *Edward II* if not a fable about the possible horrific consequences of antigay prejudice under the right political conditions? Then too, political conditions today no matter how menacing for gay people are definitely a few cuts above those of a mere forty years ago, when lesbians and gay men had no one to speak up for them in the face of child custody losses, dishonorable military discharges, imprisonment, incarceration in mental institutions, castration, and lobotomies carried out by ignorant or spiteful doctors, politicians, commanding officers, judges, or family members.

I found in the course of writing this letter that I disagree with more of David Kirp's article than I realized at first. But that is part of my point. Today one can open publications not particularly aimed at lesbians or gay men and read intelligent articles about gay issues. One can see movies made by both gay and straight people about gay lives. One can turn on television and see dramas or documentaries about different aspects of gay history. One can agree or disagree with what one encounters, but there is a space in which meaningful dialogue is at least possible. No doubt that space exists within fragile political boundaries, and no doubt it needs to be enlarged. But since the era of *Cruising* gay people have gained something rather than lost it, in the movies and elsewhere.

LESTER STRONG
New York, N.Y. □

You Left Out the Socialists!

Editors:

Michael Kazin's piece on third parties (Winter 1996) was a valuable contribution to the discussion of recent developments on the left, but it contained a truly astounding error. After recounting all of what he considers to have been the major independent presidential campaigns in this century, Kazin writes that "not since the 1890s has there been

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a national third party with any sustained appeal to voters," and that "the last alternative vehicle to run candidates across the country in more than one election was the People's party, a full century ago."

There are two things wrong with this. First, the Populists ran a presidential candidate only in 1892. True, Populists ran for offices across the country in several years, and in 1896 Tom Watson was on the ballot in some states as William Jennings Bryan's vice presidential running mate. But the People's party, formed in 1892, died in all but name four years later.

Second, the Socialist party ran presidential candidates five times in a row, beginning in 1900. In 1924 it supported Robert La Follette (in California, for example, La Follette ran only on the Socialist line), and then in 1928 began running Norman Thomas as a perennial candidate. (In 1932 he received about a million votes.)

Eugene V. Debs received 6 percent of the presidential vote in 1912. That's more than William Lemke in 1936, Strom Thurmond or Henry Wallace in 1948, and John Anderson in 1980, all of whom are included in Kazin's list of "serious independent candidates." Before World War I the Socialist party had some two hundred thousand members in five thousand locals across the country, ran candidates for all offices, and elected more than three hundred and fifty municipal officials, dozens of state legislators, and two members of Congress, one from Wisconsin, the other from New York. It seems to me that in the context of an article on third parties, the Socialists deserve at least honorable mention, especially in Irving Howe's old magazine.

None of this is meant to say that I disagree with Kazin's estimate of the efficacy of third party politics. For many years I was a third party advocate, starting when I worked in Henry Wallace's 1948 campaign. But, as Kazin suggests, it seems to make more sense to follow the example of the Christian right and put our efforts into gaining a voice in the coalition known as the Democratic party.

JAMES WEINSTEIN
Chicago, Ill.

Michael Kazin Replies:

I apologize for neglecting the old Socialist party, whose reputation Jimmy Weinstein has, over the years, done so much to revive. But organizational longevity is not, by itself, a virtue. During its short heyday, the People's party threatened to bust up the two-party system—and wielded a big chunk of power in several states in the Deep South and Great Plains. The SP never had that kind of clout. □

CORRECTIONS

We regret the errors in the credit line of the photo of Emanuel Geltman in the Winter 1996 issue. Not only did we get Manny's name wrong, but we misidentified the photographer, who was the late Chalmers K. Stewart (not Stuart).

To Letter Writers

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Conference on Democracy and Trust
Georgetown University
November 7-9, 1996

Georgetown University is hosting a Conference on Democracy and Trust on November 7-9, 1996. The conference is intended to address the relationships between democratic culture, democratic institutions, and trust which are necessary for democratic and democratizing societies in the twenty-first century. Papers will represent a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Participants include Jean Cohen (Political Science, Columbia), Russell Hardin (Politics, New York University), Rom Harré (Psychology, Georgetown and Oxford), Ronald Inglehart (Political Science, University of Michigan) Claus Offe (Humboldt-Universität Berlin, Germany), Orlando Patterson (Sociology, Harvard), Robert Putnam (Government, Harvard), Ric Uslaner (Government and Politics, University of Maryland), James Scott (Agrarian Studies and Political Science, Yale), Carmen Sirianni (Sociology, Brandeis), John Shotter (Communications, University of New Hampshire), and Charles Taylor (Philosophy, McGill).

For further information, please contact Mark Warren, Department of Government, 660 ICC or Gerald Mara, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 302 ICC, Georgetown University, Washington, DC 20057.

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The Last Page

At the new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, you don't, as you do at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, get a bright tin badge to wear once you have paid admission. Instead, you get the back of your hand stamped, the way they do at high school dances. It is a small gesture, but like the decision to have the Rock Hall of Fame guards dress in berets and black T-shirts, as if they were the security at a rock concert, it is a gesture that says much about the spirit of the place.

There is no overwhelming reason for the Rock Hall of Fame, which opened last September, to be in Cleveland. Memphis with Elvis, Detroit with Motown, Philadelphia with American Bandstand had as good a claim as Cleveland, where in the early 1950s radio disc jockey Alan Freed began playing rock—mostly rhythm and blues—on his breakthrough "Moon Dog Show."

But Cleveland campaigned to get the Rock Hall of Fame, helped fund it, and has made it one of the jewels in its downtown renaissance. On the winter day that I went there, you couldn't just pay admission and walk in. You had to wait in the lobby for an hour or more until the time your ticket allowed you into the exhibit halls. There was every reason for people to be angry with the delays. But it was an unusually happy crowd that milled about.

I. M. Pei's architecture, which takes advantage of the huge tract of lakefront on which the Hall of Fame rests, is in no small measure responsible for that. There is a feeling of openness everywhere. The dual-triangular glass tent that covers the Hall of Fame entrance and extends into a sixty-five-thousand-square-foot plaza obliterates any sense of being crowded into a museum where you are expected to react with awe to what you are seeing.

But what is most striking about the Rock Hall of Fame isn't its liberating postmodern architecture or the rareness of its memorabilia but the way in which its crowds and exhibits defy the racial and generational schisms that define so much of American life in the nineties. These days there isn't a politician who doesn't know from polls how his or her message plays age, race, and class. The same is true for television. From sitcoms to talk shows, prime-time programs are measured by whom they enable a sponsor to reach. Nobody paying for a thirty-second commercial on *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* expects to get the same audience that watches *Seinfeld.*

It's a very different story at the Rock Hall of Fame. T-Bone Walker's guitar, John Lennon's Sgt. Pepper uniform, Madonna's Jean-Paul Gaultier bra, The Supremes' "butterfly" gowns are all on display, and those who come to the museum represent a similar mix. I had expected to be a middle-aged outsider in a sea of teenagers. But the number of fortysomethings—black and white—at the Hall of Fame, on their own or with their children, eliminated that worry. If teenagers come to the Rock Hall of Fame to learn about the past and claim their musical inheritance, Baby Boomers arrive to confirm their past and see how much of it extends into the present.

There is a fairy tale quality to all of this. But it is a fairy tale based on a reality worth remembering. Since the 1950s, rock—not poetry or film or the novel—has provided the Whitmanesque element in our culture. It is the medium that has made the term crossover artist part of our vocabulary and created a context in which even British pop stars have wanted to sound black. As we close out the century, nothing could be more timely than a museum that provides us with a record of this process and an opportunity to sort through where it is taking us.

—Nicolaus Mills □

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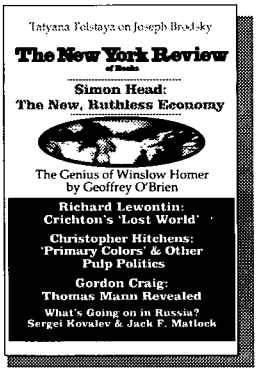

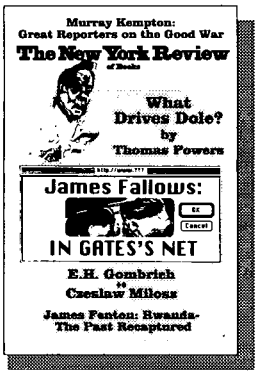

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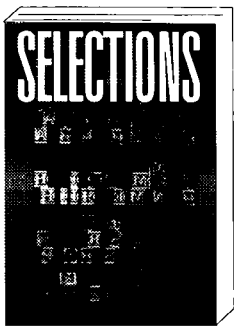

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